
STORM

STORM

A NOVEL

BY GEORGE R. STEWART

A Pennant



Edition

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STORM

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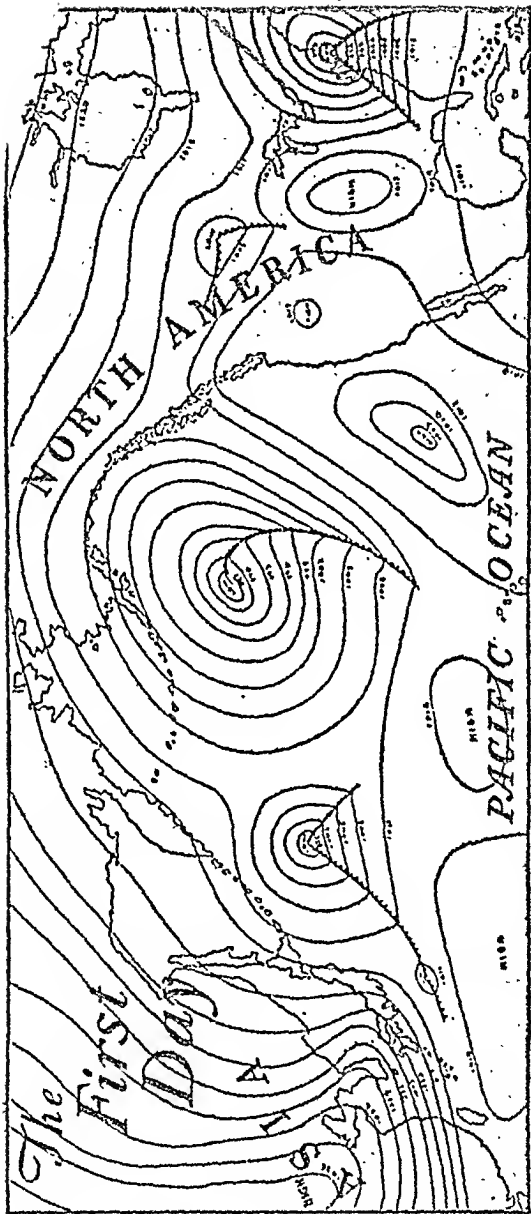
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The Seventh Day



The characters of this book—including Maria—are imaginary. Whenever, as with the Chief and the L.D., the title or office seemed to suggest an individual, a characterization of the present incumbent has been avoided. Although the scene is largely California, the story is not a local-color study, and for simplification a few alterations of setting have been introduced.

Every theory of the course of events in nature is necessarily based on some process of simplification of the phenomena and is to some extent therefore a fairy tale.—SIR NAPIER SHAW: Manual of Meteorology: I, 123.

FIRST DAY

ENVELOPED in the gaseous film of the atmosphere, half covered by a skim of water forming the oceans—the great sphere of the earth spun upon its axis and moved inflexibly in its course around the sun. Continuously, in the succession of day and night, season and season, year and year, the earth had received heat from the sun, and again lost into space that same amount of heat. But this balance of the entire sphere did not hold for its individual parts. The equatorial belt received yearly much more heat than it radiated off, and the polar regions lost much more heat than they received. Nevertheless the one was not growing hotter, while the others sank toward absolute zero. Instead, at once tempering cosmic extremes and maintaining equilibrium with the sun, by a gigantic and complex circulation, the poles constantly cooled the tropics and the tropics reciprocally warmed the poles.

In this process, cold currents bore icebergs toward the equator, and warm currents moved poleward. But even these vast rivers of the oceans achieved only a small part of the necessary whole.

In the stupendous work of transport the paramount agent was the atmosphere, thin and insignificant though it was, in comparison with the monstrous earth itself. Within the atmosphere the chief equalizers of heat were the great winds—the trades and anti-trades, the monsoons, the tropical hurricanes, the polar easterlies, and (most notable of all) the gigantic whirling storms of the temperate zones, which in the stateliest of earthly processions moved ever along their sinuous paths, across ocean and continent, from the setting toward the rising sun.

2

Early in November, had come "Election-Day rains." Chilling after the warmth of October, low-lying clouds blew in from the southwest, thick with moisture from the Pacific. The golden-brown hills of the Coast Ranges grew darker.

the downpour. In the Great Valley summer-dry creeks again ran water. Upon the Sierra the snow fell steadily. The six-month dry season was over.

Between drenching showers the sun shone brightly, warming the earth. Thousands of hillsides were suddenly green with the sprouted grass. In the valleys, overnight, the square miles of summer fallow became fields of new wheat and barley. Stockmen talked jovially to one another—a good year! Farmers in irrigated districts thought comfortably of rising water-tables and filling reservoirs. In the towns the merchants gave larger orders to wholesale houses.

November ended with two weeks of good growing-weather. The grass and the grain sucked moisture from the soil, and spread lush blades in the sunshine.

December came in—days still warm and sunny, nights clear, with a touch of frost in the valleys and on the higher hills. Farmers began to look more often to the south—but there were no clouds. Stockmen no longer went about slapping one another on the back; instead, they went secretly and inquired the price of cotton-seed meal at the Fresno mills. As the weeks passed, store-keepers grew chary about granting credit.

By Christmas, the green of the pasture-lands and the wide grain fields showed a faint cast of yellow. In favored spots the grass was six inches tall; but the blades were curled a little, and at the edges were brownish red. Where cattle had grazed, the ragged ends still showed.

The city-folk went about congratulating themselves on the fine weather. The tourist trade was flourishing. On New Year's Day the sports experts broadcasting the football games talked almost as much about the fine weather as about the passes.

But just after the first of the year pessimistic crop-reports from California helped send the price of barley up a half cent on the Chicago exchange. That same day, six great trucks with trailers, heavy-laden with cottonseed meal, plugged up the highway from Fresno; the richer stockmen had started to buy feed.

So, in the first weeks of the new year a winter drought lay tense upon the land.

in the air swirled the dust blown up from the desert. Over the mountain-jagged rim of the tableland the wind poured forth; through all the gaps and passes of the Khingan Mountains, down the gorge of the Hwang-ho. As in centuries past, it stormed across the Great Wall, asking no emperor's leave. Swifter than Tartar, more terrible than Mongol, more pitiless than Manchu, it swept down upon the plains of China.

Descending from the plateau and entering a warmer region, the air lost some of its arctic coldness; nonetheless, in the ancient northern capital the chill struck into men's blood. By day, a sun like tarnished brass shone without warmth through clouds of yellow dust. By night, the eyes saw nothing, but the dryness and smell of dust pinched the nostrils. The fur-coated foreigners (as was their birthright) blasphemed at the weather; the thin-clad, shivering coolies moved stoically about their business. Nightly in hovel and doorway, huddling in corners, some scores of the poor froze slowly to death.

Southward along the coast of China ran that river of air. Among the hills of Shantung it was still an iron-cold blast, but on the plain of the Yangtze its power was less. In Nanking and Shanghai the ice formed only in quieter, shallower pools.

The air at last swung away from the coast, and moved out over the sea; with every mile of passage across the water it grew more moist and temperate. Through a thinning yellow haze the sun pierced more warmly. Now the wind was no longer a gale, scarcely even a strong breeze. The polar fury was spent. But still, east by south, the river of air flowed on across the China Sea toward the far reaches of the Pacific.

4

In mid-afternoon the front of the Siberian air-mass was pushing slowly across the island-studded ocean which lies east of China and south of Japan. Its cold heavy air clung close to the surface of the water. Advancing thus as a northeasterly breeze, it forced backward the warmer, lighter air ahead of it, and occasionally pushed beneath this air vigorously enough to cause a shower.

This opposing and retreating air had lain, some days previous, over the tropical ocean near the Philippine Islands. A storm had taken it northeast, shedding rain, clear to the Japanese coast; it had then moved slowly back before the pressure of the cold wave. By this northern sojourn it had lost its extreme humidity and warmth, and become temperate rather than tropical. Nevertheless it still remained warmer and more moist than the air which had swept down from Siberia.

The advance of the northern air and corresponding retreat

of the southern were related, like all movements in the atmosphere, to conditions existing concurrently over the whole earth. The conditions of this particular day were such that the advance was losing its vigor and becoming slower.

An hour before sunset, one section of the front reached a small island—a mere mountain-peak above the ocean. A dead-tired man may stumble over a pebble and fall; but his weariness, rather than the pebble, is the cause. Similarly, a vigorously advancing front would simply have swept over and around the island, but now the obstruction caused an appreciable break, and a hesitant eddy, about a mile in diameter, began to form—weakened—took shape again. At one point the southern air no longer yielded passively to the northern, but actively flowed up its slope, as up a gradual hill. Rising, this air grew cooler, and from it a fine drizzle began to fall. This condensation of water in turn further warmed the air, and caused it to press up the slope more steadily with still further condensation. The process thus became self-perpetuating and self-strengthening.

The movement of this advancing warm air was now a little southwest breeze, where previously all the flow of air had been from the northeast. With this new breeze, air which was still warmer and more moist moved in from the south along the near-by section of the original front, renewing its vigor and causing a little shower. All these new and renewed activities—winds, drizzle, and shower—were now arranged in complex but orderly fashion around a single point.

As from the union of two opposite germ-cells begins a life, so from the contact of northern and southern air had sprung something which before had not been. As a new life, a focus of activity, begins to develop after its kind and grow by what it feeds on, so in the air that complex of forces began to develop and grow strong. A new storm had been born.

5

The ship's course lay almost due west. Her position was about three hundred miles southeast of Yokohama, but her port was Foochow on the coast of China, still fourteen hundred miles distant.

At seven that evening when the radio-operator came on deck, he found that the weather had changed. He noted breaks in the high cloud-deck beneath which the ship had been moving for several days. The air seemed both cool and dry, in comparison with the former half-tropical suavity. Automatically, he looked at the smoke-wisp trailing behind; knowing the ship's course, he estimated that in the last hour the wind had veered from about two points south of west to an equal angle north of west.

Since one of his duties was to read the instruments and report to shore stations, the radio-operator felt more than the usual seafaring-man's interest in the weather. He stepped in to look at the barometer; it had fallen slightly, but not enough to matter. In January a typhoon was unlikely; and besides, the international reports showed no disturbance in the region which they were now traversing.

Nevertheless, about eight o'clock a light drizzle began. This increased to a steady gentle rain; but the air was warmer than before. The light wind had backed sharply, and was now from the southwest. The smoke rose almost vertically. After a few minutes the rain ceased, but the ship still moved beneath the low cloud-deck. The air was again warm and oppressive as it had been on preceding days.

A quarter of an hour later, the weather changed again. A gust of wind, not enough to be called a squall, raised a few white-caps. Along with it but scarcely of ten seconds' duration, a sudden shower spattered the deck with large raindrops. The temperature seemed to drop immediately at least ten degrees.

"Queer weather!" remarked the radio-operator to the second officer, at the same time noticing the smoke. It was trailing off to port, again indicating a northerly wind; moreover, instead of rising, the smoke lay close to the surface of the ocean.

"Something getting ready to begin," said the second officer. "Hope it's not for us."

There was, however, no further marked change. At nine o'clock—noon by Greenwich time—the radio-operator began to make his observations, preparatory to reporting to the nearest shore station. He recorded the barometer at 1011, slightly higher than at the time of the shower. He noted the Fahrenheit temperature at 55, fourteen degrees cooler than on the preceding evening. The wind was a steady breeze from the northwest. The cloud-deck was breaking, and a new moon, low in the west, shone over the ocean-surface.

West toward the Chinese coast the ship plowed on steadily. "Whatever we ran through back there," said the radio-operator, "we're done with it." Then he sniffed curiously. "Funny thing—hundreds of miles at sea, and I'd swear I smell dust!"

6

The new Junior Meteorologist (\$2,000 a year) was working at his table. The telephone rang and he answered it mechanically, "Weather Bureau. . . . Fair tonight and Wednesday; no change in temperature; moderate northwest winds. . . . You're welcome." He clicked down the receiver with uncer-

and that he could more easily say (to himself, of course) "Antonia" than "the low-pressure center which was yesterday in latitude one-seventy-five East, longitude forty-two North."

The game, nevertheless, was beginning to play out. At first he had christened each new-born storm after some girl he had known—Ruth, Lucy, Katherine. Then he had watched eagerly, hoping in turn that each of these little storms might develop in proper fashion to bring the rain. But one after another they had failed him. Of late the supply of names had run short, and he had been relying chiefly upon long ones ending in *-ia* which suggested actresses or heroines of books rather than girls he had ever known.

Upon the present map four such storms stood out boldly—concentricities of black-pencil curves about centers marked LOW, the curves sharpening to angles as they crossed certain red, blue, or purple lines. Sylvia was a vigorous storm now centering over Boston; it—or she—had just brought heavy snow-fall to the northeastern states and was now moving out to sea, leaving a cold-snap behind. Felicia was a weak disturbance over Manitoba; she had little past and probably not much future. Cornelia was a large mature storm centering four hundred miles at sea southeast of Dutch Harbor. Antonia, young and still growing, was moving out into mid-ocean some two thousand miles behind Cornelia. In spite of their distances apart, the storms overlapped, and a curved belt of disturbed weather thus extended from Nova Scotia clear across to Japan.

In the western United States, however, and over the adjacent part of the Pacific Ocean the black curves nowhere crossed colored lines or sharpened to angles; they lay far apart and were drawn about points marked HIGH. To the Junior Meteorologist these were all obvious signs of clear calm weather. In the jargon of his trade, this region was covered by "the semi-permanent Pacific High." He looked at it malignantly. Then he smiled, for he noticed that the High had today accidentally assumed the shape of a gigantic dog's head. Rising from the Pacific waters it looked out stupidly across the continent. The blunt nose just touched Denver; the top of the head was in British Columbia. A small circle over southern Idaho supplied an eye; three concentric ovals pointing southwest from the California coast furnished a passable ear.

Dog's head or not—the Pacific High was no laughing matter for California. While it remained, every storm advancing in holdly from the Pacific would sheer off northeastward. A drenching rain would pour down upon the south Alaskan coast and Vancouver Island; a steady drizzle in Seattle and Portland. But San Francisco and the Great Valley won't

He shrugged his shoulders. The local Weather Bureau had to deal in immediate practicality; there was little need and no time for mathematical abstractions. And besides—he was forced to admit—with data supplied by a single ship and by weather stations two hundred miles from the center of activity, the application of highly refined methods was hardly warranted.

With resignation he again turned his attention to the map, and considered the lonely cluster of notations in the ocean. That particular ship, he presumed, had just passed through the area of disturbance. In a few hours it had probably crossed the boundary between warm and cold air more than once, and had experienced changeable but not very pronounced weather. The ship was moving west; the storm, like all such storms, was moving easterly. Ship and storm would not meet again, and yet for a moment the two lingered together in his thoughts. Doubtless the ship would be of interest to sailors, but to him it seemed wholly dull and mechanical. It might be one of twenty built to the same specifications, indistinguishable from the others unless you were close enough to read the name. But the storm! He felt the sudden rise of feeling along his spine. A storm lived and grew; no two were ever the same.

This one—this incipient little whorl, come into being south-east of Japan—would live its own life, for good or bad, just as much as some human child born the same hour. With the luck of favorable conditions it would grow and prosper to a fine old age for a storm; just as possibly it might languish, or be suddenly annihilated.

There remained one other detail, and this called for no marks on the map. He must name the baby. He considered a moment for more names in -ia, and thought of Maria. It was more homely than Antonia or Cornelia; it did not even sound like them. But it was a name. And, as if he had been a minister who had just christened a baby, he found himself smiling and benign, inchoately wishing it joy and prosperity. Good luck, Maria!

SECOND DAY

AS A CRAB moves on the ocean-bottom, but is of the water, so man rests his feet upon the earth—but lives in the air. Man thinks of the crab as a water-animal; illogically and curiously, he calls himself a creature of the land.

As water environs the crab, so air surrounds, permeates, and vivifies the body of man. If traces of noxious gas mingle with it, he coughs and his complexion turns deathly gray. If he becomes overcharged with water-droplets, he gropes helplessly in fog. If it moves too fast, he becomes a pitiable wind-swept creature, cowering in cellars and ditches. Even for rain he is dependent on air. If actually removed from air, he dies immediately.

Physicists describe the air as tasteless, odorless, and invisible. It could not well be otherwise. But these are not so much its qualities as adjustments of man. For if the air impressed the senses, being at the same time all-pervasive, it would necessarily obscure all other tastes, odors, and sights.

Air is so bound up with man's life that only with difficulty can he realize its existence as something in itself. To a savage it is as much an abstraction as consciousness; a child can conceive wind, which is air in motion, but not air itself. In our own language, *wind*, *mist*, and *rain* are ancient words, but *air* is a late and learned borrowing of a Greek word, which itself originally meant *wind*.

In his pre-natal months, indeed, man is aquatic. But thrust forth into the atmosphere—small and red—he sucks in a first breath spasmodically, and owns his allegiance to air. Seventy years later, a nurse stands by an old man's bed, waiting for what is known as "the last breath."

Even among the so-called land-animals, man is less than most bound to the earth. His tree-dwelling ancestors may have descended to the ground furtively, as to a foreign and hostile region; in civilization people spend most of their time upon raised platforms called floors.

As individual men move in a too well-known landscape without noticing its features, so man—fallaciously—takes for granted the all-pervasive air. His historians deal in lands and seas. But most movements of peoples have been not so much quests for better countries as for better atmospheric conditions. "A place in the sun" explains much of history more exactly than we usually realize, except that just as often we should say, "A place in the rain." A thunderstorm in hay-time may overthrow a ministry, and a slight average rise or fall of temperature may topple a throne; a shift in the storm-track can ruin an empire. In the twentieth century a temporary variation of rainfall put Okies upon the highway by the hundred-thousand, just as in the third century a similar shift might in a single year hurl the Huns against the Chinese frontier and set the blue-painted Caledonians swarming at Hadrian's Wall. In the mass as in the individual, man is less a land-animal than a creature of the air.

At five minutes to four on January mornings there was never any sign of dawn. Few buildings showed lights, and the Chief, still sleepy, felt himself steering from street-lamp to street-lamp like the captain of a coastwise steamer laying his course from one lighthouse to the next. An occasional truck passed by, showing that even at that hour the city did not entirely give over activity.

One advantage of getting to work so early was that at least you had no parking troubles. As he walked across to Tom's All-Night Coffee Shop, he took a professional survey of weather conditions. No moon, stars bright everywhere, cloudless; fresh breeze from the northwest; temperature safely above frost; a typical winter morning for San Francisco.

"Fair and warmer," said Tom.

"If it doesn't rain," replied the Chief, completing the formula begun so many years back that they had forgotten the original joke.

"Orange juice, coffee, mail."

"Right, Chief," said Tom, putting a morning paper on the counter.

The Chief glanced at the headlines without enthusiasm--rumblers of war, labor crises, political strife. He felt a stirring of pride at his own international profession in which you were pitted against natural forces, not your fellow-men. By association of thought he glanced out of the window. A row of electric lights now shone brightly from the flat roof of the Federal Building just across the street, one of the boys must just have gone up to read the instruments. Tom's clock pointed at four—but that meant noon, Greenwich time. At this minute, everywhere, observers in weather stations were peering at thermometers and barometers, and scanning the sky to see how much of it was cloud-covered.

He had a sudden thought of the whole world and all those observers. In London and Paris they would read the instruments and have plenty of time left before lunch. In Rio it was nine in the morning; in New York, seven. Here on the Pacific Coast men turned out sleepily at a very inconvenient hour. But Alaska was even worse off. By the time you got around to New Zealand, the observer most likely stayed up till he read his instruments and went to bed afterward. The Japs had an easy time of it--about nine in the evening. In Bombay it might be sundown; in Athens and Cape Town, early afternoon. Ships at sea changed hours as they moved. And what about the Arctic stations? There it was night all winter anyway, and perhaps a man arranged his private life by whatever time was most convenient.

He came back from his survey of the world as Tom set breakfast before him.

"What'ya goin' t'give us t'day, Chief?"

"Hn-n? Nothing much today, Tom, I don't believe."

"Time y'were searin' somethin' up for us. Sure could use a rain."

Tom moved off to a new customer. The drought was really getting bad, the Chief reflected, when the proprietor of an all-night-restaurant began talking about it.

Down the counter Tom was obviously telling the newcomer who the other fellow was. The Chief had long known that he was Tom's most treasured exhibit. He could hear the not-too-well-muffled voice.

"Yessir, that's Old Weather Man himself."

"Yu-don't-say!" The Chief caught the tone of mingled surprise and awe. A lot of people, he knew from experience, never quite sensed any difference between predicting weather and making weather.

Tom's coffee still warm within him, the Chief walked along the lighted corridor on the top floor of the Federal Building. On the right were the Administration offices; on the left, the Climatological Division. Both were still dark. Only ahead could he see light shining through a glass door; it bore the words: *Forecasting Division*. At that point the Chief felt his regular tingle of professional pride. Administration—that meant stenographers and mailing-lists and pay-checks, just what you found in a thousand other offices in the city. Climatology—that was only endless statistics about dead weather. But Forecasting—that was the battle-line.

"Hello, Whitey. . . . How are you, boys? . . . Any reports in yet?"

"Nothing yet, sir," said Whitey.

In the chart room stood a long table divided into four sections, a draftsman's stool at each. On the nearest stool sat the new Junior Meteorologist; he had almost finished the plotting of air soundings taken at various Pacific Coast stations that night. The Chief looked at the graphs. Phoenix, San Diego, Burbank. The lines ran upward and inclined off to the left; here and there they showed angles; a definite reversal of direction marked the point at which each balloon had entered the stratosphere. Oakland, Medford, Spokane. In a minute his practiced brain had summarized what was happening in the upper air over the district.

The next chart displayed the winds of the western United States at two-thousand-foot intervals from the surface up to fourteen thousand feet. Upon the first map the arrows pointed in many directions, for at the surface local relations of hill and valley were often the determining factors. The two—

four-thousand-foot maps were largely blank, for the mountain stations were actually above that level. At six and eight thousand the map filled in, and a fairly simple wind-pattern began to appear. At ten thousand and higher all the winds were strong and from the west.

Just as the Chief was finishing his survey, the sudden click of a teletype-machine rounded from the next room. Involuntarily, he smiled. It was like a bugle-call. During the next hour his life would move at its fastest.

"Who's chart-man this morning?" he said.

"I am, sir," said Whitey.

"Good."

The Chief turned from the long table to the smaller one which stood in a windowed alcove. His own chair was in the alcove facing inward. Opposite it, across a large table, was a chair for the chart-man. On the table lay a large outline map of North America and the adjacent waters, a tiny circle representing each weather station. As yet only the local report had been entered; the wind-arrow and the little cluster of figures at San Francisco stood lonely and conspicuous against the vast area of continent and ocean.

By now more than one teletype was rounding. Whitey came in with the first batch of reports, settled into his seat, and with a fine-pointed fountain pen began entering the data. An arrow graphically indicated wind-direction, and the number of bars the wind-force. The amount and design of the shading within the tiny circle showed cloud conditions. Figures and other symbols served to record pressure, temperature, humidity, and other conditions as needed. North Platte, Concordia, Omaha, Sioux City. The map no longer looked so empty in the region of the Missouri Valley. Knoxville, Charlotte, Atlanta, Charleston. Whitey was working with the speed and accuracy of a machine. Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Washington.

Until the map was nearly finished, the Chief could not really begin his work. He walked into the teletype room. As he entered, its activity seemed to rise in crescendo. The machines clicked like maddened typists; their bells rang; conveyors from the vacuum tubes plunked into their baskets.

To an outsider, everything might have seemed insane confusion; to the Chief, it was the ordered rhythm of life. That machine which kept clicking out messages with scarcely a break—he knew that its impulses came from an office in Chicago which served as clearing-house for the weather reports of half the continent. Another machine clicked continuously and in addition, as if in mere exuberant good spirits, loudly rang a bell every few seconds. This was the Weather Bureau's own wire linking together the stations along the

lines. The other four machines, serving local telegraph and radio stations, were sometimes silent, but by contrast their bursts of activity seemed even more feverish. To add to the confusion one of his own men was cutting a teletype ribbon; for at the proper moment San Francisco must become a sending station and report the local conditions to the rest of the world.

In spite of years of routine the Chief felt a deep smoldering excitement; the moment drew nearer. Will the good priest ever fail to stir as the ritual of the mass rises to the climax? Will the true actor, even after a thousand nights, take as a matter of course the cue which yields him the stage for his great scene? And for the Chief this was no mere ritual or drama, passing inevitably toward a fixed end. It was a contest, a battle, in which the mighty forces of the air were preparing against him unknown attacks and ambushes. He hurried back to see how the map was shaping up.

Whitey was still working like a high-speed machine. Winnipeg, The Pas, Qu'Appelle, Swift Current. Most of the United States and Canada was now filled in. Between California and Hawaii a dozen ships had reported. Taking up a new batch of radio messages, Whitey dropped some thousands of miles southward and began with ships along the Mexican west coast; this work was a little slower, for he had to locate latitude and longitude. *Nansu, Olaf Maersk, San Roque, City of Brownleigh*. A moment later he was back above the Arctic Circle in the Canadian Northwest where stations lonelier than ships sent out the readings of their instruments by radio through the polar night. Coppermine, Atlatvik, Fort Norman, Chesterfield Inlet.

The teletype room sent out less noise. The bells rang only now and then. The Chicago line was quiet. Occasionally some machine broke suddenly into action with a belated report, or something gone astray, or a correction. Whitey relaxed enough to make his first mistake. He cursed softly, and reached for his ink eradicator. Mr. Ragan and the Junior Meteorologist worked steadily at their table, plotting changes of temperature and pressure since the previous reports.

Although the Chief had not noted any passing of time since the reports had begun, he saw now that the clock stood at a quarter past five. The electric lights still blazed in the office; the blank windows showed only darkness outside.

shoulders. After all, as he liked to demonstrate with pencil and paper—5 is just as easy to read as 5 once you get used to it.

From whatever direction observed, the map as yet represented nothing but confusion. For each of several hundred stations and ships Whitey had recorded a half dozen or more separate notations. Over the United States the map was nearly filled with numbers and seemingly cabalistic symbols. Even to the Chief such a map was only a recording of data which he must reduce to order.

First of all, he set himself to locate the present position of the storm which had been advancing toward the south Alaskan coast. Heavy rain and a sharply falling barometer at Sitka indicated that the front had not yet passed but was probably close. With his purple pencil the Chief drew a line lying just west of Sitka and curving slightly until it ended two hundred miles west of the Washington coast.

Since no other storms of importance for his district seemed indicated, he began with his isobars. Through the maze of figures he worked confidently. With Denver reporting pressure at 1016 and North Platte 1012, he started his 1014 isobar about half way between the two. He drew it slowly in a curve northwesterly. As the reported pressures indicated, he left Rapid City, Miles City and Havre on one side of the line with North Platte. Cheyenne, Billings, and Helena rested on the other side with Denver. He drew the line onward, bent it around Kamloops in British Columbia, and then brought it sharply toward the southwest just including Vancouver and Victoria within its curve. Off the coast it met the purple line which he had drawn south from Alaska. Although no ship had reported from near this point of junction, the Chief took his isobar across the other line with a sharp angle to indicate the sudden drop of pressure associated with a passing front. Then he paused; a vast region of ocean devoid of notations stretched out before his pencil.

"How about the *Byzantium*? She's out here somewhere."

"No report from her, sir."

"H-n?—Must be a poor ship! Any report yesterday?"

"Yes, yesterday. But not the day before."

"She'll probably come in late, and spoil my map. Well . . ." With a further grunt of disapproval, the Chief drew his line on, southwestward, across the empty Pacific spaces. It might easily be a few hundred miles misplaced, but lacking information he had no remedy. Skillfully he looped the isobar around the Hawaiian Islands, and ran it back toward the continent. He drew it across the northern end of Lower California, kept Tucson just within the curve, and finally joined it to its beginning, east of Denver.

Starting with another line, he followed the same procedure. In ten minutes the map had taken form.

As he worked, the Chief felt a touch of sadness. He remembered Tom saying: "Sure could use a rain." Well, there was no rain in sight. That storm along the Alaskan coast might bring a drizzle as far south as Oregon. The Chief wished that he could repay Tom's confidence and conjure up a storm somewhere from nothing. But for three thousand miles to the west stretched off the great high-pressure area. Every ship on the Honolulu run reported light winds and clear skies. On the great-circle route from San Francisco to Japan there was a lack of vessels, but the liner *Eureka*, sixteen hours out of San Francisco, reported a pressure of almost 1020, discouragingly high. Just as he was contemplating the *Eureka*, Whitey came in.

"Well, here she is, Chief—the *Byzantion*. We'll see if she spoils your map."

The Chief shrugged his shoulders, and looked at Whitey locating the position—forty north, one hundred forty-three west. Whatever her nationality and business might be, she was a little south of the Japan lane; the Chief imagined that she was heading for Shanghai; but he knew very little about the various ships and the commerce they represented. He judged them by the regularity and completeness of their reports. By the set of Whitey's shoulders, he knew that the *Byzantion* had turned the trick against him.

Whitey finished and straightened up. Yes, the ship reported 1015. With the resigned air of a man who deals in actualities, he erased a long section of one isobar, and redrew it in the indicated position two hundred miles farther north. Whitey grinned, not unsympathetically; still, the joke such as it might be, was on the Chief.

The shift of a single isobar meant little in the general situation. The Chief looked at the finished map, and felt a let-down. The excitement of the day was over, and as often, its end was anti-climax. From today's map even a fairly intelligent monkey could not go wrong. He turned to his typewriter; "Might as well have had a rubber-stamp," he thought. "So—so" this last month." Without hesitation he wrote:

The hour hand of the office clock was approaching six. Outside, a faint light had begun to transfuse the darkness.

3

Around the curve of the earth, the day-old storm moved eastward, leaving Asia behind. Upon the opposite face of the sphere the sun now shone, but the storm swirled over darkened waters. Although among its kind it must be counted immature and small, nevertheless it had grown so rapidly that it already dominated an area which was a thousand miles across.

Around its center the winds blew in a great circuit—counterclockwise. In the whole half of the storm-area northward from the center there was little cloud or rain; dry, cold winds were blowing from the east and north. Most of the weather-activity lay to the south along the two fronts, the boundary lines between cooler and warmer air. Extending from the storm-center, like the two legs of a widespread compass—warm front and cold front—they moved rapidly eastward, and the storm center moved with them. As a wave moves through the water without carrying the water along with it, so the storm-center and the two fronts moved through the air, yet themselves remained a single unit.

The southwest breeze which, thirty hours before, had first sprung up near that rocky island south of Japan, had now grown to a great river of air five miles deep, five hundred wide. From over the tropical ocean it poured forth its warm and moist air. Then, as it might have blown against a gently-rising range of mountains, it met the slope of the retreating northern air, and spiraling upward, swerved in toward the center. Ascending, it cooled; its moisture first became cloud, and then quickly rain. Thus, like a great elongated comma—head at the center of the storm, tail reaching five hundred miles to the southeast—the continuous rain-belt of the warm front swept across the ocean-surface.

Not all of the southern air ascended that slope; some of it lagged behind and was overtaken by the advancing line of cooler northern air which formed the other compass-leg, the cold front. Here the northern air forcibly thrust itself beneath the southern air. And since the slope was much steeper, the warm air ascended with a rush, and the reaction was almost explosive. (Old navigators of sailing ships knew its like as the "line-squall"; most of all they feared its sudden treacherous wind-shift, which dismayed many a good vessel despite all seamanship.) Above a five-hundred-mile line of white-caps, the cold front swept forward. Dark thunder-clouds towered high above it. In contrast to the gentle rain-bringing warm front, its passage brought the terrors of the tempest—squalls,

drumming rain-bursts, hail, thunder and lightning, the fearful wind-shift. The passage, however, was quick as it was violent. In a few minutes the front had rolled on eastward; behind it, here and there, heavy showers poured down, but before a cold steady wind from the north the clouds were breaking, and ever-widening patches of blue showed clear and clean.

4

The great clipper, one would have said, hung motionless between sky and ocean. Though the unloosed power of the four engines hurled the plane onward at close to two hundred miles an hour, still the surrounding vastness of featureless space offered no fixed point by which to observe its speed. Far below, too far for individual waves to be apparent, the blue ocean stretched off, unbroken to the sight by ship or island. The whole arch of the sky was cloudless blue. Only the sun gave a point of reference, but its movement was more rapid than the plane's; to judge by the sun, one could only conclude that the plane was speeding backward.

Though the Navigator was sometimes conscious of illusions, they never confused his sense of actuality. At any given moment he knew to a nicety his position on the predetermined route from San Francisco to Honolulu. Although his theoretical range of vision extended about a hundred miles in every direction and covered an area as large as Ireland, he did not rely on sight. Within this circle, to be sure, were at least three ships, but they were at distances which would probably make them invisible to the unaided eye; to hunt for them with a telescope might be as tedious as looking for a penny dropped on a landingfield; and then spotted, they could yield him no new information. Without the direct aid of sight, by instruments and by radio, he nevertheless plotted his course confidently.

The Navigator's face, however, was worried. A passenger seeing him might have thought that he feared some impending disaster. Actually, like many another mortal, he was worrying about the monthly bills. Last evening, instead of thinking epic thoughts about the morrow's flight through space, he had sat down at the dining room table with his wife, and spent several hours going over the family budget. Three small children with contradictory tendencies toward too large tonsils and too small sinus openings kept a man guessing. Yet this month there had been no doctor's bills; the water bill, however, was high.

Then he suddenly smiled, realizing a series of connections which on the previous evening had escaped him. It should have been simple to a man in his profession. While the Pacific High stood firm, California had dry weather. The garden

would require water, but the children would not need the doctor to drain their sinuses. And of even more importance to the family, as long as these conditions held, his own flight of fourteen hundred miles across the open ocean was hardly more dangerous than a street-car ride.

He did not look at the weather-map—he saw it plain in his mind. From San Francisco the great concentric ovals of the High pointed off southwestward. Around those ovals, clockwise, the wind blew steadily. Today, with the course charted south of the High, he was sure of a favoring tail-wind which would bring the plane to Honolulu with gas-tanks still comfortably full. On the return voyage, if the luck held, he might have a course along the north side of the High with the same steady tail-winds.

That nest of ovals upon the weather-map looked dull and uninspiring enough. He himself, not primarily a meteorologist, had no clear idea of what the High meant in the whole cosmic scheme. But he had a vivid sense of how those ovals affected his own air-route. They shunted off the storms toward British Columbia, and so gave generally fair weather for the Honolulu run; and also they formed a great benign swirl of air which with ingenuity might be made, paradoxically, to serve both going and coming. When the High broke up, there was a different story.

Looking ahead, the Navigator now saw a ship. By the rate at which it seemed to come dashing toward him, he again became conscious of the plane's own rapid motion.

5

Since the glacier-ice began to melt from the mountains and the crags to show their shapes, the quiet lake has lain at the foot of the gorge. No one knows who first crossed the Pass.

While the ice still lingered, mountain-sheep must have worn the first trails—faint dull traces across the granite. After some centuries the black-tailed deer followed; by then the ice would have been gone. Next come Pai-ute or Washoe, gathering seeds and pine-nuts. So recently as if it might have been yesterday, some trapper may have watered his horses at the lake, and leaning on his long rifle squinted into the westering sun as he worked out in his mind a route upward from ledge to ledge.

For certain, we know, the covered wagons came in '44. Old Caleb Greenwood and hawk-nosed Elisha Stevens guided those emigrants down the Humboldt River. At the sink they found a Pai-ute chief whom they called Truckee. Squatting, he drew them a map in the sand. So they crossed the desert, and went up along the swift river which they called Truckee for the map-drawer. They met the snow at the lake, and

death, the streamlined trains slide by. And over that camp where the poor emigrants ate the forbidden meat, the pilots of the wide-winged planes follow the whining Reno beam to Blue Canyon, where—turning—they set their last course for the airports of the Bay.

6

Like Casey Jones, the Road Superintendent kissed his wife and started out for the day's work. He was not a railroad man, and the hour was not half-past four. Nevertheless, the comparison is sound; for about the Superintendent and his job gathered something of that matter-of-fact heroism which makes the song of Casey Jones the epic of the American working-man.

He drove slowly along the Highway; he was inspecting, not traveling. CALIFORNIA—U. S. 40 stared at him from the neat shield-shaped markers. He passed between the slender bright-orange snow-stakes standing at hundred-foot intervals on both sides of the Highway. He saw a stake leaning over, and got out to straighten it. A car with a Minnesota license slowed down beside him.

"What those stakes for, brother?" called an abrupt voice.

"Snow-stakes," said the Superintendent, but the face into which he looked was blank. "You see, when there's snow—deep—the snow-plows have to steer by these stakes."

"Say—you kidding us, brother. It's January—where's your snow? Why we had fifteen inches in one storm the other day. You telling *us* about snow?"

The car started forward suddenly, but the Superintendent heard a woman's voice trail back from it.

"Those things must be eight feet high. Just like California!"

He drove on, a little disgruntled. People from northern states always made trouble—thought they knew everything about driving in snow. He'd like to see that crowd now, getting around Windy Point on a bad day. Fifteen *inches* of snow—why, man, on Donner Pass you figure snow by feet, not inches!

Well, that was MINNESOTA anyway. CALIFORNIA and NEVADA didn't count. He got NEW YORK, and ILLINOIS before reaching the Lake Tahoe turn-off. Noting "foreign" licenses was an unbreakable habit of no practical importance; it was perhaps a sign of his pride in the great Highway which he served. UTAH, OREGON. A big gasoline truck thundered by; its trailing chain struck sparks. Then went a towering van with a trailer; half a dozen special licenses spattered its rear-end. A streamlined transcontinental bus speeded toward him. A big truck passed, laden with bulging sacks; "Idaho potatoes, or onions," he thought.

PENNSYLVANIA, NEBRASKA. Yessir, he'd bet, considering how high it went, U. S. 40 carried more traffic than any other road in the world. And he was the one who saw that it got through. ALBERTA, MISSOURI.

He passed the Donner monument; the refreshment stand was boarded up for the winter. Dirty remnants of snowdrifts lay here and there. Now the road skirted along the Lake; it was unfrozen; glittering in the sun, it did not seem even very wintry. At the western end of the Lake he came to the gates which at his word would be closed across the Highway. Beside the road the big sign read: *Snow conditions over Donner Summit—U. S. 40*, and then below in large letters ROAD OPEN TO ALL TRAFFIC.

By now he was in the shadow of the Pass. The ground was thinly snow-covered; little windrows of snow thrown aside by the plows (remnants of the November storm) lay at each edge of the pavement. Beyond the gates, the grade began. He passed the six-thousand-foot marker and Turn-out. The road clung to the side of the gorge, curve after curve. A heavy truck came down, back-firing. Too fast, that fellow. He passed a jalopy—ARKANSAS. It was steaming hard from the radiator. Migrant-laborers they looked like, not many on this road, in winter anyway.

He went by Big Shot where the road had been blasted out of a great granite cliff—a bad place here for snow-slides. The snow was getting deeper as he ascended, but still the ridiculous-looking orange stakes stood up high, even where the plows had piled snow against them.

Rocky Point brought a puff of wind, and then he swung back into the quiet of the little hollow around which the road swung in the Horseshoe. He was right beneath the crags now; high above, he saw the Bridge. He heard the mutter of a plane overhead; a locomotive whistled from somewhere. ILLINOIS (had that one already); COLORADO; MICHIGAN.

Windy Point always lived up to its name—some trick of the slopes around it probably. From the Point he saw the snowsheds of the railroad, and the line of many-wired telephone poles which plunged right down the face of the Pass without needing to twist and turn like the road. He was almost above timber-line now; trees were stunted and grew only in sheltered spots.

Between Windy Point and the Bridge he passed men working along the road. He tooted his horn gently, and waved at them as he went by. In the rear-view mirror he noted that they did not hurry to return to work, but stood talking and lighting cigarettes. No matter. They were as well as he that shovels would never keep Donner

Still, you couldn't just let men sit around the bunk-house all day, playing poker—had to make a gesture of keeping them at work. Let them loaf a little while they could. They'd work hard when they needed to.

He came to the Bridge. Two cars had halted at the turnout, and some women were oh-ing and ah-ing at the view of the lake and of the road twisting down the face of the Pass. UTAH again, and TENNESSEE.

He swung around the last loop, drove through a cut deep-blasted in granite, and came to the big garage of the Maintenance Station. The building was chiefly an immense, high-pitched roof of corrugated iron designed to resist snow. It looked ridiculous now, like the snow-stakes. Not more than three feet of dirty-looking old snow was piled up under the eaves.

Inside, he walked down along the row of four great rotary plows, giving them a quick inspection which he knew was useless. They fairly glistened with readiness. Tire-chains were already on, and spare chains hung in place. The great truck-like bodies were piled with gravel for weight to give traction. But in the blunt noses, the cutting edges of the great augers were dim with the rust of disuse. On the opposite side of the garage were the push plows with their big, twelve-foot shares, and the single V-plow. Ready to roll!

In the work-shop too many men were standing around with little to do. The whole set-up made the Superintendent think of a military post with the garrison built up to war strength and waiting for the outbreak of hostilities.

"Hello," he greeted the Day Foreman. "Everything O. K.?"

"The machines are O.K. all right, but the men not so good—goin' stale. Can't keep 'em busy." He dropped his voice. "Swenson and Peters started a fight last night, but we pulled 'em apart."

The Superintendent's jaw thrust suddenly forward. "Can't have any of that stuff," he said, and started for the bunk-house.

The bunk-house was only a hundred feet from the garage, but connecting them was a tunnel-like passageway for protection against the snow.

Peters was out working, but the Superintendent took Swenson into the wash-room. He was six inches shorter than the big Swede and forty pounds lighter, but he was boss and he laid down the law. Swenson was properly apologetic, and the Superintendent said to forget about it but not to do it again. You couldn't be too hard on the men; they needed their jobs; Peters had a wife and three kids down in the Valley.

Driving on westward along the Highway, the Superin-

tendent was still thinking about it. Come a good snow-storm, and Swenson would be swamping and Peters operating in the same rotary, thick as thieves. Funny—the machines could stand lying around idle, but the men couldn't. Well, machines meant more than men on this job. MICHIGAN again. He could fire a couple of men and get others. But if he smashed a rotary in a storm, he might lose the road.

West of the Summit the road descended much less rapidly, and was less spectacular; but it was just as hard to keep clear. The Superintendent let his car glide along more swiftly. At Norden and Soda Springs and Fox Farm there were respectable depths of snow; but on south slopes in the bright sun the snow was melting and trickles of water ran across the Highway. Near Rainbow Tavern the Superintendent took off his coat. As he drove, he noted the condition of the pavement and the shoulders, making sure that nothing would interfere with the work of the plows.

Finally he pulled up at the little corrugated-iron garage which the road-men had dubbed Tin Barn. He got out of the car to stretch. The sun was brilliant overhead; the air was spring-like. The longer the storms held off, some people said, the harder they hit. But the Superintendent cared little for weather-lore—or for official forecasts either. When snow fell, you just turned out your plows and started throwing it off the Highway. He cast an unnecessarily defiant look at the harmless, clear blue sky. *Let 'er come!*

7

The Junior Meteorologist began to map the Pacific area with a feeling of almost paternal interest as to whether Maria had survived the perils of babyhood. As he filled in the map, he saw a small storm in about the expected position, but he reserved judgment.

Sylvia had moved out over the Atlantic beyond range of his map. Reports from Port Nelson, God's Lake, and Fort Hope vaguely indicated that Felicia was centering over Hudson Bay. Cornelia was beating in fury against the south Alaskan coast. Antonia was not developing as he had expected; she had suddenly matured, and moving off sharply to the north was entering Bering Sea. And certainly—yes—that small storm well to the east of Japan could be nothing else than Maria.

Already, the J.M. noted, Maria was showing personality. She was fast-moving, having traveled a thousand miles in twenty-four hours. This meant an average rate of over forty miles an hour, and yet none of the reporting ships indicated a wind of more than twenty-five miles; Maria, therefore, must be moving as a wave. As another individual quality,

Maria was keeping a little to the south of the previous storm-track. He attributed this immediately to the influence of Antonia, which from her position in Bering Sea partly blocked the more northerly route. But he shook his head. Such reasoning got nowhere; it only raised the next question: what caused Antonia to behave as she did? He thought of his old professor's saying: "A Chinaman sneezing in Shen-si may set men to shoveling snow in New York City."

He decided that in general Maria might be called a normal child. She had certainly grown in healthy fashion. Along with this growth had come a sharp lowering of pressure, brisker winds, and heavier rainfall. Nevertheless Maria was still young and undistinguished. Along her cold front she might be kicking up some respectable local squalls, but elsewhere ship-captains would log nothing more than Fresh Breeze and Moderate Sea. And as for size, a storm only a thousand miles in diameter rated in the Pacific as a half-grown child. Nevertheless, the J.M. still felt his paternal discoverer's partiality: "A darn good little storm," he felt himself wanting to say to someone.

His map was finished, and he called the Chief over.

"Hn-n? Anything special?" said the Chief.

Then the words popped out before they could be suppressed: "Fine little storm developing there east of Japan!"

The Chief looked, and the J.M. was embarrassed at his own enthusiasm, almost an emotional partisanship, certainly not scientific.

"Where'd she come from?" said the Chief in his matter-of-fact voice.

"Incipient yesterday, north of Titijima." The words were professional, but hardly concealed the tone of pride.

The Chief glanced back at the map of the preceding day. "Hn-n? Yes. I should say you're right. A fast mover!"

But the Chief naturally showed no special interest in Maria. His eyes swept back and forth. Then they rested upon the Canadian Northwest. He turned to the map of the preceding day, again studied the same region, and then came back to it on the current map. Beginning to be curious, the Junior Meteorologist watched the glance shift to Cornelia in the Gulf of Alaska, then pass on to Antonia and again to Maria, come back through the vast Pacific High to California, sweep over the United States, move north to Felicia over Hudson Bay, and finally return to the point of departure. But after this rapid circuit of nearly half of the northern hemisphere, the only comment was the usual, non-committal, "Hn-n?"

For a few seconds the Chief still bent over the map, and the lines on his forehead creased as if he tried to solve the

problem. Then seeming to feel an explanation in order, he remarked shortly, "Too many unknowns."

He straightened up. "That's a very neat map you've drawn. Pressure rising a little at Coppermine—did you notice?" And retreating to his own office, the Chief shot behind him a final arrow: "About time, too!"

8

A proud City, set upon hills, pearl-gray in the winter sun, swept clean of smoke and dust by the steady wind from the sea. Last warder of the West, a City looking forth upon that vast water where West in the end became East, space so wide as if to defeat Time the ancient, and cause the calendar to lose a day. A City bearing the Phoenix for its symbol, proud that like the Phoenix it had more than once sprung to life from its own ashes. A City of towers and banners.

From those towers the great banners stood out stiff in the northwest wind. These were not the national flag; *that* emblem you might see floating modestly from the squat Customs House, the very wind stolen from it by the tall surrounding towers. (One might think of some medieval city where feudal strongholds rose defiant, one against another, commanding the King's own palace.) Highest of all, as if it ruled the City, flew the blue banner of Telephone. Across a narrow street the two lords of oil flouted each other—red and yellow against blue and white. Maroon of Grand Hotel, crimson and black of the Bank, blue of Power-Light, blue and gold of the Railroad. One might have said that these and their like were the rulers of the City and the World.

Yet one might well look again. Was it perhaps by some inter-company agreement that all the banners streamed off to the southeast? No, not the Board of Directors, not even the stockholders voting as one man, could make their flag fly to the north. The Chief Engineer himself could not contrive that miracle.

From sources too mighty and too far removed for even the great companies to manipulate, that wind drew its power and assumed its direction—from the contrast of ocean and continent, from the whirling of the earth, from the sun itself. That air had come on a long journey. Northeastward from the doldrums of the equator it had moved, miles high above the ocean in the great upper current to the anti-trades. Upon a spiral two thousand miles long it had flowed back to earth around the gentle swirl of the Pacific High. Now it was swinging southward until it would doubtless join the wide sweep of the trades, reach again the doldrums plodding into thunder-storms rise to the upper a and start north once more.

Upon this very day the directors of Power-Light meeting in their room on the sixteenth floor had just heard a discouraging report about the depleted water-reserves in their hundred and more artificial lakes. The directors would gladly have paid many thousands of dollars to any man who could alter the direction of that flag by ninety degrees and bring in a southwester. But they did not even consider such a solution. Instead, with long faces, they approved the expenditure of certain huge sums for the operation of auxiliary steam power-houses.

Upon the sidewalks of the City, people on the shady side drew their coats around them, but on the sunny side they felt cosily warm. The cool clean air filled the lungs; there was vigor in it. Shrewd merchants put forward their best displays, and quoted the proverb, "Do business with men when the wind is in the northwest." At street-corners the eddies of air set men clutching at their hats, women at their skirts. "Fine day . . . Fine weather . . . Bracing . . . Good for golf . . . puts life in 'a fellow."

High upon the towers, in the sweep of the far-traveled wind, the great banners streamed out steadily southeastward.

THIRD DAY

IN AN AGE all too familiar with war the yearly cycle of the weather is well imagined in terms of combat. It is a war in which a stronghold or citadel sometimes beats off assault after assault. More often the battle-line shifts quickly back and forth across thousands of miles—a war of sudden raids and swift counterattacks, of stern pitched battles, of deep forays and confused struggles high in the air. In the Northern Hemisphere the opponents are the Arctic and the Tropics, North against South. Uncertain ally to the South—now bringing, now withdrawing aid—the sun shifts among the signs of the zodiac. And the chief battle-line is known as the Polar Front.

There is no discharge in that war, nor shall be until the earth grows cold. Yet every spring as the sun swings north through Taurus, it renews the forces of the South, and they sweep forward as if to final victory. Night vanishes from the Pole, and in unbroken day Keewatin and Siberia grow warm. The northern forces shrink back into their last stronghold over the ice-cap. The sun moves from Cancer to Leo. The Polar Front is no longer a well-marked battle-line; few and

weak storms, mere guerrilla skirmishes, move along it close to the pole.

Then, as if thinking the victory won or as if wishing to preserve some balance of power, the sun withdraws into Virgo and Libra. Again night falls over the Arctic. The northern ranks re-form and advance. But the forces of the South still feel the sun at their backs and will not be routed. The line of the Polar Front becomes sharply marked—cold polar air to the north, warm tropical air to the south. And along the Front, like savage champions struggling in the death grapple, the storms move in unbroken succession.

In January the sun rides deep in Capricorn far from the northern Pole. Unbroken darkness lies over the Arctic, and from the ever-deepening chill of that night the cold air sweeps southward. Now it battles fiercely along the Polar Front, and now at some favorable point a lightning column breaks through and pierces clear to the Tropic. But still the forces of the South fight stiffly, and their ally never wholly deserts them. For even in mid-winter the broad equatorial belt lies hot in the sun, and high in the air through the great current of the anti-trades its reserves move northward toward the battle-line.

So in mid-winter the combat is fiercest, for then the forces of heat and of cold both are strong, and have drawn most closely together. At that time, as in many another war, the citadels of the combatants are quiet and peaceful. In the South the trade winds blow gently, week in, week out. Far to the North the stars shine in the calm polar night. Only in that No Man's Land which is the Temperate Zone the storms raid and harry.

Then the sun moves from Aries into Taurus, and the southern forces drive northward once again.

In meteorology the use of such a military term as "front" may be a chronological accident—that the theory was developed in the years following 1914, a time when such military expressions were on everyone's tongue. The theory has become much complicated, but men still talk of the Polar Front, and may even yet talk of it when the Western Front has happily become a dim memory.

Had the discovery been made in more peaceful years, men (who involuntarily try to humanize nature) would perhaps have derived a term from marriage rather than war. This comparison also is apt—love, as well as hate, arises between unlikes, and love like hate breeds violent encounters. Best of all would be to use words unrelated to human feelings. Those great storms know neither love nor

Through the darkness after moon-set the big owl flitted, ghostlike, upon noiseless wings. The forested mountainside held out thousands of convenient branches, and he circled first around a small pine tree, seeming just ready to alight. Then, driven by whatever force controls the destiny of owls, he spiraled down to a pole of the electric transmission line which ran straight along the side of the ridge.

The owl sat in contentment upon the wooden cross-arm. In due time he neatly regorged, owl-fashioned, some skins and bones of mice, and felt ready for further flight. He stretched out a wing comfortably, and with a feather-tip happened to touch one of the copper wires.

A crackling flash of blue-white light illumined the mountainside. Then came darkness again. In the darkness the scorched body of the owl tumbled to the ground; a few feathers drifted off in the breeze; from the wire a faint emanation, as of smoke, rose momentarily.

Later a wild-cat picked up the owl's body; he carried it away from the smell of man which clung to the pole and made a meal of it at his ease.

3

Huddling in overcoat and muffler against the winter chill, leaning heavily upon a cane, the old man moved along the sidewalk. With dimly seeing eyes he peered uncertainly through the yellow half-light of the street-lamps. He was very old; once he might have been fairly tall, but now he was bent and shrunken; the hair which showed at his temples was snow-white. As he came to the steps of the Federal Building, he paused and then tapped with his cane to be sure that he had seen aright.

He rang the night-bell. The watchman recognized him, and let him in without question. Going up in the elevator, he was silent. Yes, he could remember the situation well. The low had moved in across Tennessee; the pressure at the center was 29.5 or close to that; and the year was '98, April. But there was something else he couldn't remember, something about Maine. Pressure had been high over Maine, he was sure of that all right; but there was something else and it bothered him—Maine, rain, Spain. And a senseless rhyme kept bobbing up in his head: "He drove the span-yards, back to their tan-yards."

The elevator-man spoke to him.

"Think we're goin' to have some rain soon?"

"Yes, it will rain soon."

"Feel it in your joints, eh!"

"I do not feel it in my joints," said the old man formally. "But—but—but I *know*."

"Well, I guess if the boys upstairs can't figure us a rain with all them maps, we'd better not try."

"I—I *know*," said the old man, and drew himself up stiffly.

Feeling ahead with his cane, he came into the chart-room.

"Good morning, sir," he heard a voice say.

"I should like to see the observations taken. I trust I am not too late."

"He's just gone up, sir. . . . Here, I'll help you."

"Thank you, sir; I see better sometimes than others."

With his right hand gripping the steel rail of the circular staircase the old man moved more confidently. He ascended carefully step by step, went through a door, and came out upon the roof. A row of electric lights showed him the way through a maze of skylights and ventilators. He came to the little louvered instrument-shelter, at which a man was reading a thermometer.

"Good morning, sir," said the old man.

"Good morning," said the other, and as he noted something upon his pad, the light falling on his face showed him to be very young.

With professional courtesy the old man said nothing more during the taking of observations. But he watched carefully. The young man read temperatures on the maximum and minimum thermometers, and gave the former a spin for resetting. Then he dipped the wet-bulb thermometer in a can of water, spun the handle vigorously, read the result, spun again, then once more, and recorded wet and dry temperatures. Next he observed the star-covered sky for clouds, "None," and visibility, "Unlimited." He made his notations and turned to go.

"Have you taken wind direction and velocity, sir?" said the old man.

"They're recorded automatically downstairs."

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten." Then the old man made a little snorting noise. "You youngsters—pretty soon you'll make up a forecast without even going outdoors! In *my* day a weather-man had to be good. Now, with all your instruments and reports coming in by wireless, anybody can do it. In *my* day, we used to say, you read the barometer, and stuck your head out the window, and then made a forecast. You had to be *good*, sir, to do that."

"You think so, eh!"

They moved back toward the stairway. The old man was ahead; the young man was impatient, but he could not pass among the skylights and ventilators.

"We are going to have rain," said the old man.

"Well, Grandpa, I'm sorry to disappoint you; but that's impossible with the present air-mass situation—for several days anyway."

"Air-mass poppycock! I don't need any square-head Scandihoovian telling me about my own weather. Why, in those days we didn't get reports from west of the Mississippi half the time. We had some stations—Fort Benton, and Corinne, and so forth—but the Sioux were still on the war-path, and I guess they cut the wires. Yes, you had to be good, then. We were quite a crowd in the old Signal Service days. 'The duties of this office,' our Chief used to say—'permit little rest'—yes—'little rest and less hesitation.'"

Both were silent a moment, and the old man's next remark was startling for lack of connection.

"The New York papers had editorials."

"What!"

"Yes, I remember the *Herald* distinctly; the editor commended our work. Of course it really was a good deal colder than we expected. Some of the West Point cadets were frost-bitten quite badly."

"Oh, you mean the forecast for Grant's inauguration? I've heard that one before, thanks."

As they came to the stairway, the young man moved ahead and went rapidly down.

The old man descended slowly. He went on through the chart-room and along the corridor. He was almost sure that he had forgotten something. Also he felt a little hurt and confused. The young man had seemed almost disrespectful to him. Sometime he must take up this air-mass matter; he wasn't sure that he really understood it, and these strange three-dimensional storms.

Then his mind turned in sudden flight from the present, and he was in the winter of 1881. That was the year he had been in Chicago; he remembered things very clearly, even a red-haired girl. Yet the memory of her was not half so vivid as the memory of a storm which had moved down from Minnesota. He saw the whole map clear in his mind. Then he entered the elevator, and went down.

On the ground floor as he walked toward the door, someone greeted him:

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, sir," he replied, blinking to clear away the little haze before his eyes. "I remember the face, but I'm afraid I don't know who you are."

"I'm the Chief Forecaster, sir."

"Oh, of course. You look older."

"Not since day before yesterday, I hope!"

(But the old man was thinking of 1902, and the bright youngster he had hired that year to sweep out the office and such things, over in the old building.)

"It is going to rain," he said.

"Well, in that case you'll want to stay, won't you, and see the map made up."

Then he remembered—that was what he had forgotten. He should have stayed, but now there was his pride.

"No, thank you, sir. No, thank you. I have some appointments." And he walked out as stiffly as he could, into the morning darkness.

As he went along, he tapped now and then with his cane to be sure where he was. "It is going to rain," he said to himself sometimes. "I know, I know."

4

The Load-Dispatcher entered the Power-Light Building promptly a little before eight. His entry caused no flurry among the dozens of employees who were moving toward the elevators. Only, in one corner of the lobby two burly men were standing; there was a certain country-jake look about them, and they stood ill at ease—strangers to the city. As the Load-Dispatcher passed by, one of them nudged the other.

"That's him!"

"Gosh, you mean the L.D.!"

Those two—down to see the white lights on a vacation—were from Johnny Martley's maintenance gang which worked out from French Bar Power-House. In their lives the President of Power-Light was only a vague "big-shot," but the L.D. spoke with the voice of God. In this opinion they did not differ from some thousands of other employees in the far-reaching system—linemen, operators, ditch-tenders, switchboardmen, foremen, even superintendents of sub-stations and power-houses. Many hundreds of them had never seen him, but he was as close as the telephone-bell. Generally some subordinate was on the line: "The L.D. says . . ."; occasionally it was even more like a thunderbolt: "The L.D. speaking . . ." In Plumas County a ditch-tender's wife kept her children quiet by threatening to "tell the L.D." During the fire at North Fork Power-House a Mexican laborer in imminent danger of being cooked had spontaneously called for help to the L.D. instead of the Virgin.

Nevertheless the actual Load-Dispatcher who entered his office at 7:59 was not god-like in appearance. His office too was ordinary; since the public did not penetrate to it, the company saw no reason to replace a shabby stood there out of memory.

The L.D. pressed a buzzer. A man in shirt-sleeves entered; he wore a green eye-shade, and had a portable telephone-transmitter on his chest.

"Hello, Terry," said the L.D. "What news?"

"French Bar reported a momentary short—just after midnight—on their sixty k-v line."

"Has Martley reported what caused it?"

"No, not yet."

The L.D. was silent for the space of six seconds. Through his mind were rushing figures which represented time and space modified by conditions of topography, season of year, and efficiency of men. From long skill the calculation was so rapid that it resembled intuition; thus by being so highly rational the L.D. had gained the reputation of playing hunches.

"If Martley doesn't call before eight-seventeen, get in touch with him."

"Yes, sir."

The L.D. noted, not without satisfaction, the slightly awed air with which Terry departed. Well, he hoped eight-seventeen would be all right; Martley was as good as any of them, but the open winter tended to make men get slack. Nevertheless, to ask for a report too soon merely made men think the L.D. was nervous or petulant or demanding the impossible. To let them report before you asked encouraged them to be slow. But if by keen calculation you hit close to the exact minute, word of it would run along the company lines from Shasta to Tehachapi, and every man in the system would get on his toes, feeling that the L.D. was watching.

He turned to the papers on his desk. The weather forecast—fair, no change in temperature. He looked at his own forecast of power requirements for the present day, shown as a red line plotted on graph paper. In the early morning hours the curve was lowest, for then the only demands were from the twenty-four-hour industries and an occasional night-hawk. The red line mounted as (from long experience) he had made allowance for early risers snapping on their lights. It jumped suddenly around seven-thirty as daytime industries took over, and thousands of housewives plugged in percolators and toasters. It stayed high until noon, dropped suddenly for the midday lull, rose at one o'clock, and mounted to its peak at five-thirty when in the winter twilight millions of lights came on. Beneath the forecast curve, plottings in colored pencil showed the distribution of load among the many power-houses, allowance made for repair work in progress, depleted water reserves, and a hundred other factors.

This was the forecast, but any unforeseen happening

would disturb it. If a sudden cloud appeared, twenty thousand office-workers might casually turn on the lights, and the L.D. was responsible that those unexpected lights should neither flicker nor be dim. If the evening was warmer than usual, five thousand old ladies might decide not to plug in the electric heater, and the L.D. was responsible that this unused energy did not flood the system and disarrange the delicate continuous process in operation at the Consolidated Paper Mill.

Nevertheless, the L.D., sitting at his desk, was not busy that morning. Like all first-class executives he arranged that assistants handled the routine, and he held himself for emergencies and long-time planning. And this year had been easy. As often, he thought of the paradox in which he was involved. In the long run, not only Power-Light but also the whole state depended upon the water furnished by the great winter storms; yet these indispensable storms were his chief problem, and sometimes he caught himself, against all rationality, wishing for a dry year.

Yes, this was an easy season, so far. The November rains had caused little trouble; in fact they had been a help rather than otherwise, for they had shown up a few weak places which had since been made strong. But eventually something would happen. No need to say that he had a hunch or felt it in his bones. Sooner or later, it was a mere matter of record, the storm struck.

He thought of his thousands of miles of power-line. In their great spans the 220,000-volt wires hung from the high steel towers—dipping and rising in their perfect curves, mile after mile. In never-varying sets of three the graceful waves of copper crossed hill and valley, spanned river and canyon, formed the sky-line along foothill ridges—165,000-volt, 110,000-volt. Less majestic, the 60,000-volt wires hung from sturdy cross-arms upon wooden poles. And below the high-voltage system came the low-voltage distribution lines, a mileage of them that was dizzying to contemplate.

Yet the wires were not all. They headed up at the power-houses, but above the power-houses were penstocks and canals and dams and lakes like inland seas. Then, mixed in with the power-lines were sub-stations with maze-like bus-structures and myriads of switches.

It was all his responsibility, and it all lay open—open as the face of the town clock—to every storm. You could hardly blame him if now and then he inconsistently wished for a dry year.

To be sure, he was neither single-handed, nor defenseless, nor unprepared. Except in occasional nightmares, he was himself master of the situation. First of all, his a

age-long experience of man against the weather, stood behind him. Next came the half-century of trial and error which his predecessors had undergone—and paid for. Brains long since moldered had discovered for him the proper length of span and height of tower, the strength of wire, and toughness of wood and steel. He was wise with the knowledge gained as men died in blinding flashes, or lay crushed beneath broken poles.

Every wire in that system, every tower and pole, every dam, yes—he thought—the strength and courage of every maintenance-man was figured to balance the power of that old storm-bringer, the southeast wind. The lines were strong enough to stand average bad weather; beyond that they had a margin of safety for any bad weather of record. Moreover, during the autumn all lines had been patrolled. Men had inspected every doubtful point with field-glasses, and had replaced worn wire, spotted insulators, and uncertain cross-arms.

In spite of it all, the L.D. did not scoff at storms. The system was so large that concealed in it here and there must lie countless flaws—faulty material, slips of workmanship, totally unpredictable injuries. All those flaws now lay quiescent; or cropping up one by one, they could be repaired in good weather by routine maintenance-gangs. In rain, wind, snow, and clinging ice, many might let go all at once and under conditions which would make their repair a ten-fold problem.

It was a condition of his life. To build equipment so strong that it never broke down was not economically feasible, even if it were practically possible. The system had gone through '16 and '38; it could keep on going.

The door opened and Terry stood there again, telephone on chest.

"French Bar reporting," he said; "their men couldn't find anything that caused the short."

Terry hesitated, and so the L.D. restrained the question he wanted to ask.

"Say," Terry went on, "I called him at eight-seventeen—you know—like you said. Martley said he didn't know yet, and then the men came in while I was on the wire." A touch of awe came into Terry's voice, as he faded again through the door. "You sure hit it on the nose that time."

Even when left alone, the L.D. maintained his pokerface. No one could have been sure that he smiled when, for further assurance as to the weather, he glanced through his window and saw, two blocks away, the blue banner of Telephone still streaming out before a northwest wind.

The sermons and Bible-readings of his youth had left only a few perceptible and curious tokens upon him. For one thing, he was fond of the expression "act of God," but since he confined it to disasters he must apparently imagine God as practicing sabotage.

This conception was borne out by the few biblical verses which he liked to quote. "Get this!" he would say to some youngster who was in training. "This is the one business you can't take any chance in. Why?—because the Lord's working against you. It says so in the Bible. 'Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps—Fire, and hail; snow and vapors, stormy wind fulfilling his word.' 'Fulfilling his word,' that means they work for him. Dragons and deeps you can maybe forget about. But fire. That's lightning, and all kinds of electrical disturbances that go with it—static that mixes up the radio beams and gets a pilot lost. Hail and snow—that's icing conditions. Vapor means fog and low ceilings. Stormy wind means turbulence. Remember that verse and you've got all the inside of what a storm means to the air lines."

He would pause a moment for effect, and then go on:

"What's more, who is it that the Bible calls the prince of the power of the air? Why, the Devil! And, believe *me*, when you got the Devil and God workin' against you, you got to watch your step."

No one was ever sure whether this diatribe was serious or whether it was a pedagogical and mnemonic device to impress his subordinates with the fundamentals of good flight-dispatching.

As for his own practice the CSO played safe by employing every good principle of meteorology and aerodynamics. Beams, beacons, and constant radio communication kept his pilots on their courses. No plane went out with an overused engine, and he was ruthless against pilots of doubtful skill or intelligence.

"For this is the way," he would express it. "You can't foresee the weather all the time. Eventually you get caught. Then, if you have a good plane and a good pilot, he can most likely come through anyway."

Upon the expanse of the vast switch-board, repeated before each of the dozens of operators, appeared the names not of mere local exchanges, but of cities. NEW YORK, LOS ANGELES, SEATTLE, CHICAGO, DENVER, VANCOUVER, HONOLULU, and dozens more. Beneath the names were small round holes, each the opening of an electrical connection known as a jack. Let an operator push the plug into one of the ten jacks labeled NEW YORK, and she talked across three

thousand miles as easily as someone talks across a room.

Sometimes, walking through that operating-room, the District Traffic Superintendent of the telephone long-distance lines thought of a football game. Like linesmen, shoulder to shoulder, the scores of operators faced the great switch-board. Close behind them, like backs supporting the line, the supervisors shifted here and there, caring for anything which might disturb the operators' steady routine. In the rear, like a safety-man, the chief operator sat at her desk ready for trouble which might prove too much for a supervisor. The DTS himself, the coach, remained generally in his office, far on the sidelines, planning and directing.

The analogy, he told himself, was far from exact. In fact, one of his chief efforts was to remove from his workers the sense of strain and constant emergency which was the essence of any athletic contest. And yet in the same way, he imagined, every coach must plan his defense. His hope must always be that the line would stop each play as a mere matter of routine. The other defenses were for greater or less emergencies.

Sometimes during long periods of calm he welcomed those walks; they seemed his only touch with concrete reality. Of his company's three operating departments, Plant cared for wires, cables, and poles, and Commercial kept and collected the bills. But in his own department—Traffic—he was seldom immediately concerned with anything so material as wires or money. Instead, he dealt with such abstractions as voice-channels. His traffic consisted not of freight-cars or motor-trucks, but of minute and invisible electric pulsations by which ideas crudely and conventionally interpreted in voice-sounds moved from place to place. Thus like a magician of telepathy he supervised over a vast area the miracle of thought-transference. For him space had lost its power.

Yet he realized always that his work was not magical, just as in the end it was not abstract. His voice-channels passed through real wires and cables which hung from poles or lay buried beneath the ground. In his imagination, partly picturing maps, partly remembering actual landscapes, he saw the three great long-distance leads running out from the City—north, south, and east. Eastward, the Central Transcontinental, its stout poles carrying forty wires, surmounted Donner Pass; across the Nevada deserts its insulators glittered in the sun; it reached Great Salt Lake, and passed on toward the Atlantic. Northward the Seattle lead skirted the base of Mt. Shasta, and twisted among the labyrinthine gorges of the Siskiyoues. Southward, the Los Angeles lead followed the valley highway and mounted over the slopes of the Tehachapis. Close at hand, the

vivid in his mind; farther away, they dimmed; at last, passing beyond his jurisdiction, they disappeared also across the horizon of his mind.

At every point those thin strands of copper were subject to failure, and most of all they suffered before the assault of the winter storms. The underground conduits were safest, but even they could be washed out by floods. As for the overhead cables and open wires, they could resist rain, but were vulnerable to every unusual attack of clinging snow, ice, and wind.

When the storms came and the lines lay broken, the men of the Plant Department must go out to replace wire and set poles. But the Traffic Superintendent, dry in his office, also fought the storm—patching together new circuits, rerouting calls, keeping the traffic going through.

6

San Francisco calling Colusa. Hello, hello . . . Oh, hello, Jim. This is Pete, Consolidated Flour Company, you know. . . . Sure, you big horse-thief, hope you're the same. . . . But look here, I'm comin' up through your one-horse town Sunday afternoon—can I see you? . . . Okey, okey. I'll see you there; maybe I can sell you a coupla pounds of flour even on the Sabbath. Good-by—Oh, no, say—you still there? . . . Good. Say, you were tellin' me about that cutoff last time. Where do I hit it? . . . Okey, I'll remember—turn left at Tom and George's Service Station. I can maybe use that five minutes it'll save me. Well, good-by . . . Good-by. See you Sunday, Good-by.

7

"Public Service—" said the Chief with a little gesture of his hand toward the door. He did not blink, but the Junior Meteorologist wondered if there wasn't the little flicker of a wicked smile. The J. M. went into the other room, and greeted the two nuns and the dozen gawky girls in ugly uniforms with black stockings—the physics class from a local convent school. Sister Mary Rose was plump and youngish; she taught the class, and was obviously trying to be progressive. Sister Mary Dolores was thin and oldish; she apparently came along to chaperon Sister Mary Rose, and her attitude seemed to be that if God had wanted us to know about the weather he would have informed St. Thomas Aquinas.

The J. M. showed them some instruments first, and when he pointed out the barometer, Sister Mary Rose said, "Torricelli!" as if she had that one located properly.

Then the J. M. showed them his map. The wind-arrows

were easy to explain, because all you had to say was that they pointed the direction of the wind and the number of barbs was proportional to the strength of the wind. Isobars were harder, but the J. M. made a shift at explanation by saying that if a ship could voyage at that particular time all the way around one of the isobars the barometer would show the same pressure all the way. After that success, he warmed with enthusiasm, and discoursed five minutes about some elementary matters like air-masses, fronts, and extra-tropical cyclones, before he realized that nobody had the slightest idea what he was talking about. Then he talked in simpler and simpler terms until finally he broke out into a sweat and got down to words of one syllable.

"You see," he said, gesturing to help himself out, "a high is more or less like a deep pool in a stream. Everything is quiet there. Or it's like a dome in the air, and the air keeps kind of sliding down the sides, in a spiral. And since the air is coming down, it gets warmer and can hold always more water, and so there isn't rain from that air, or even cloud."

"You remember," said Sister Mary Rose to the class, "Boyle's Law—about pressure."

The J. M. took a long breath to cool off, and saw Whitey grinning from across the table.

"And a low," the J. M. went on manfully, "is like a shallow whirlpool where everything is going fast. There's less air at the center and so the outside air tries to flow in and fill up the center but that makes lots of wind and kind of spins around so fast that another force—centrifugal force . . ." He paused doubtfully again.

"Yes," said Sister Mary Rose brightly, "Newton."

"Well, centrifugal force throws it—helps throw it—out toward the edges, and—and—well, anyway, in a low there are places where the air is rising. And where it's rising, it's getting colder and the water-vapor it has in it has to come out as rain, and that's why—well, more or less—why we get rain when a low comes along. And we know a low is coming when the pressure falls."

The J. M. did not look, but he could feel Whitey's grin.

"And what, children," Sister Mary Rose was saying, "indicates the rise and fall of pressure?"

"*The-barometer-sister*," said the class in unison, having obviously been well coached on that point.

"And always remember," the J. M. went on in polite desperation, "that warm air is lighter, and so tends to rise over cold air."

"Just like in a hot-air heating system," said Sister Mary Rose.

"Yes, that's right," said the J. M. cordially, being glad of any assistance, "and our rain falls out of warm rising air that's getting cooler."

"Does the class have any questions?" asked Sister Mary Rose.

"What," said a determined young voice, "is a typhoon?"

At this sign of interest and intelligence Sister Mary Rose beamed. Even the J. M. was encouraged.

"A typhoon," he said, and then was suddenly overwhelmed by the impossibility of decently explaining a typhoon without the aid of integral calculus.

"A typhoon," he repeated, "oh, that's a big storm at sea they have over near the Philippine Islands." To his amazement this answer satisfied everybody.

The class went out, each bobbing and thanking the J. M.

"That sure was a fine, *scientific* lecture—" said Whitey, "in terms of 1902. I thought you were trained in air-mass."

But the J.M. had done his duty, and was not going to be badgered. "Public service," he said, feeling that he was learning some of the answers. But he thought to himself that the Chief ought to put someone like Whitey on jobs like that, not someone with a real scientific attitude. Then he settled to his desk and forgot all about it.

The storm now dominated a region which was as large as the United States westward from the Mississippi.

The Junior Meteorologist again looked at Maria with interest as for the third day she appeared on his map. At the time of observations she had centered, as closely as he could determine, at the one-hundred-eightieth meridian, almost in mid-ocean. Since this meridian was also the International Date Line, Maria had thus been in the anomalous position of having her warm front still in Thursday while her cold front stretched off through Friday for a while, until its trailing end was again in Thursday. In spite of her size Maria nowhere touched land. She centered exactly between Midway Island and the southernmost Aleutians, almost filling the broad space between.

The J.M. decided that on the whole Maria had changed but little since yesterday. She remained a fast mover, having again traveled more than a thousand miles in the twenty-four hours. She would still have to be called a vigorous and growing young storm. Already the horsepower developed by her winds was enough to equal that of a dozen tropical hurricanes combined, but this huge energy was spread over such a wide area that nowhere, except perhaps in a few squalls along the cold front, did her winds reach gale force.

Now that Maria was well advanced into girlhood she was no longer the youngest of the family. Two new storms had

already developed along the Asiatic coast, and were moving out to sea. But the J.M. regarded them with no special interest; he did not even find names for them, but since they had appeared at the same time he called them The Twins and let it pass at that.

The rest of the map also had little to offer. Antonia, continuing her erratic and suicidal course, had moved close to Bering Strait and come into a region of polar high pressure; she was rapidly disappearing. Cornelia was still beating against the south Alaskan coast. She too was losing energy, but a bulge of isobars eastward showed that some of her Pacific air had crossed the mountains. This eastward elongation, the J. M. decided, would bear watching.

As his eyes wandered north toward the stations along the Arctic Ocean, he realized even more surely that something might be about to happen. The Chief, as he remembered to his chagrin, had commented upon Coppermine the day before. Quickly now he checked back over his previous maps. On Tuesday, Coppermine had reported 1020; on Wednesday, 1022; now on Thursday, 1023. During the same time the wind had been blowing from the east or northeast and growing stronger; the temperature had fallen slowly.

Tantalized, he looked at the broad blank spaces over Beaufort Sea, and beyond. How could anyone know what was happening when there were holes like that in the map? And here in California he did not have reports from the Atlantic or from Europe and western Siberia. That little rise of pressure over Coppermine seemed slight, and might be some local development. Or it might be the bulging snout of some great mass of cold air from over the polar ice-cap. Even if it were, without round-the-world reports you could not be sure how it would move.

The Chief came, and looked at the map, particularly at the Arctic stations. He said nothing, but two or three times he emitted his doubting little nasal grunt. The J. M. wanted to ask a question, and felt his scientific curiosity urging him to gather information in all humility wherever it might be found. But his pride as a recent distinguished graduate of the Meteorological Institute suddenly objected to asking a question of the Chief whom he often felt to be nothing but a weather-guesser. He compromised with an affirmation which was really a question:

"That polar air-mass is about ready to let go, I should say."

"Hn-n? Well—yes, and no."

The tone of voice was so level that not until after several seconds did the J. M. begin to wonder whether the committal reply had been a...

angry—these Weather Bureau old-timers! He remembered his experience of the early morning.

"That old fellow was around again when I was taking observations. He gets in the way quite a bit. He says it's going to rain—he *knows*. Maybe we'd better take him back on the staff."

It was funny the way when you started talking about personalities, other people gathered round. Now Whitey and Mr. Ragan were standing right there.

"Hn-n?" said the Chief. "The Old Master! That's what Whitey calls him. Well, he was a good forecaster, one of the best, for his time."

"Good forecasting demands good data and good theory," said the J. M., quoting a professor's lecture. "They didn't have either, fifty years ago; but they may have been good guessers, and their wording was always vague."

"I met him down below," said the Chief. "He told me about the rain too. Of course, he's right—as long as he doesn't mention any time-limit. It's always *going* to rain. What they say about the barometer—the only time you can believe a barometer is when it reads CHANGE; the weather is always sure to change."

He moved off, but Whitey and Mr. Ragan remained.

"The Old Master is all right," said Whitey belligerently.

"He's nuts!" said the J. M., not mincing words now that the Chief was gone. "He's got a light in his eye. Why, this morning on that little rickety platform on the roof I watched out. He might push somebody off!"

"Nuts yourself! He's past ninety, and you're a good strong kid. You sure must be easy to scare."

"He's a bore too. He told me about Grant's inauguration again."

"All right, we've all heard that story pretty often too. But when I get to be as old as the Old Master I'll probably tell how we predicted forty days and forty nights of rain for Noah's flood—right here in this office."

As Whitey talked, Mr. Ragan stood nodding his head solemnly. But the J. M. turned back to his map, pointedly, dismissing them and the controversy.

Nevertheless, even as he put the final touches upon the unquestioning lines of his isobars, Whitey and the others seemed to stare at him from the map. They were jealous of him, he reasoned—of his training. Even the Chief must be; the Chief hardly knew enough mathematics to figure *theta-e*. And Whitey would never rise higher than Observer; he had tried the Civil Service examination three times and always failed the mathematical part. Mr. Ragan had been a promising youngster once—had even published an article on cy-

clone tracks; but he had died above the ears about 1915, and been a routine worker ever since.

Yet the J. M. was not too well pleased with himself either. He knew that he was a good meteorologist, but he wanted also to have companionship. He was in a strange city, and lonely. But he always seemed to be giving the cold shoulder to the boys in the office. He knew their nickname for him—the Baby Chief. The Chief part he liked; but the other word gave the whole nickname too ironic a tinge.

The phone rang. He answered it, and listened to the question put by a raucous female voice. He almost winced, and he grimaced as he answered. "Yes, madam," he said, trying to maintain professional courtesy in his voice and yet make it vibrate with deepest irony. "The forecast is for fair weather; I'm sure that you will be quite safe in hanging your washing outside."

He turned back to his map in irritation. Even if you put in an automatic telephone system to answer anyone who dialed Weather-1212, still people called up with petty questions. He wished suddenly that he had taken the airline job when he had the chance.

Between earth and stratosphere the storms moved eastward, and he was trained to plot their courses. But he had to answer questions about hanging out the diapers—he was sure it was diapers!

He pulled open his drawer, and saw the well-worn leather case containing his slide-rule. Reflectively rubbing a fingertip across it, he noticed that he left a track in a faint film of dust.

8

Over a large region of the ocean near the Hawaiian Islands a long calm had rested. Through a cloudless atmosphere the tropical sun beat down upon the water. The air grew warmer and warmer, and day after day absorbed moisture from the surface of the ocean. This water-vapor, even without becoming visible as cloud, was able to intercept much energy from the sun's rays, and thus the humid air grew warm even at high levels.

The passengers of a liner traversing the region declared themselves on the verge of heat-prostration. They lay in deck-chairs, and sipped constantly at tall glasses of iced drinks. On the outsides of these glasses water at once formed in a film, and then quickly in large drops which trickled down until the glasses stood in puddles on the table. The passengers frequently expressed surprise that such weather did not relieve itself in a shower, not realizing that the air also was sufficiently warm to prevent the sudden

burst of heated surface air which would make possible a thunderstorm.

In an area a thousand miles long and five hundred miles broad, above an ocean which was smooth to the suggestion of oiliness, the air nowhere offered any zone of quick transition in temperature and moisture. Warm and languid, soppy with tepid water as a wet sponge, far and wide the air lay quiescent.

9

After half-past eight the rush-hour in the restaurant was over. Jen got away from her cashier's booth to put the call through to San Francisco.

"Hello, Dot, hello. This is Jen, *Jen*—your sister Jen."

Dot expressed surprise, pleasure, and anxiety; as one may when receiving an unexpected long-distance call. Jen cut her short, because the tolls would be running up.

"Sure, I'm in Reno—as usual; and I'm fine. And say, I got it fixed up to come down and stay with you Saturday night and Sunday, if it suits. I got a boy-friend driving me down—get to your house maybe around midnight—leave late on Sunday. All right?"

Dot expressed delight at the proposed visit, and then the usual married-sister's doubt about such runnings-around with a boy-friend. What if the car broke down? And who was he? She got the usual answers:

"But I'm often out till after midnight around here, and you wouldn't think anything of that. He's just a fellow I know—name's Max Arnim. But, say, the time on this call is running up. Thanks, and I'll see you then. 'Member me to Ed and the kids."

Jen went back to her place at the cashier's booth, and the proprietress eyed her approvingly. Jen kept her accounts straight, and as to looks she was just about right. She had a rounded little figure, and her light-brown hair had a touch of red in it. Otherwise she was just nice-looking, pretty maybe, not beautiful. Older men liked to pass a word with her, but the younger fellows didn't hang around too much trying to date her up. In a wide-open town like Reno you had to watch things like that if you were running a respectable place.

10

Over all the top of the world rested unbroken darkness like a cap. Through that polar night the flow of heat off into outer space was like the steady drain of blood from an open wound. As the air thus grew colder and colder, it shrank toward the surface of the earth, and to fill its place more

air flowed in at the upper levels. Upon every square mile of snow-covered land and frozen sea thus rested hourly a heavier weight of air.

Until two days previous this accumulation had been relieved by a great flow of cold air southward from Siberia into China. But since that time a series of storms had developed, and by their interlocked winds had blocked off this flow. All China now had mild temperature.

If the earth had not been revolving, if it had presented no contrast of sea and land, or even if there had been no mountains, the frigid air might merely have moved out in all directions from the pole, pushing beneath the warmer air in somewhat orderly fashion, as ink spilled upon a blotter seeps out to form an ever larger circle. But actually the cordon of storms surrounded the polar air, holding it back by the force of their winds as a line of police, now jostled back a little, now pushing forward, restrains an angry crowd. In Greenland, in Alaska, and in Scandinavia, high mountains also were barriers. But elsewhere, here and there, the line of the polar front bulged southward, as the crowd pushes forward against the police-line, not everywhere, but at spots where those who are boldest or angriest, most wronged or most desperate, whisper to one another and make ready for the sudden push.

Or, as a momentarily defeated army driven within a fortress daily restoring its morale and knowing itself too strong for the besiegers begins to renew the battle, so the polar air pushed out southward, now here, now there, feeling for weaknesses. Blocked in China, it thrust down the open ocean-corridor between Norway and Greenland; but a wide-spreading storm moving swiftly out from New England across the Gulf of St. Lawrence brought rain and snow to the mid-Atlantic and checked that sally. So the polar air pushed elsewhere, at every point where the mountain barrier was broken or the storms seemed weaker—into the broad Arctic plain of Canada, at Bering Strait, under the lee of the Ural Mountains.

A fur-trader upon Victoria Island in the Arctic Archipelago, stepping from his cabin into the shadowless day-long twilight, felt a change of weather. He had long ago stopped bothering with the thermometer, but from experience he knew that the customary twenty or thirty below zero had yielded to something far colder. He spat experimentally, and the spittle crackled as it struck the ice-covered ground; that meant about fifty below. It was much too cold for snowflakes to form, but a few tiny spicules and ice-needles came down on the fur of his sleeve, as the falling temperature so

the already dry air some last vestiges of moisture. A steady breeze moved from the northeast. Along the lines of his cheek-bones above his thick beard, already he felt a numbness. The dog which had followed him from the cabin whimpered a little. "Softy!" said the trader; but he recognized the warning, and went back into the cabin. He brushed from his beard the frost which had formed from his breathing. Then he filled the tea-kettle, knowing that the dry air, when warmed inside the cabin, would suck the moisture from his throat and eye-balls. He decided to stay inside.

Undimmed by day the circling constellations glittered over polar ice and snow; the North Star stood at the zenith. Now and again, above the frozen ocean, the aurora flared bright. Hour by hour the heat radiated off. The temperature fell; the weight of air grew heavier; the pressure rose. And inevitably the hour of the break grew closer.

FOURTH DAY

WEATHER-WISE after their kind, men say, the frogs from their puddles croak before rain, and the mountain goats move to the sheltered face of the peak before the blizzard strikes. Such also may have been the wisdom of man's ancestors before man was. In nerve-endings now decadent, they felt the moisture in the air; in the liquids of their joints they sensed the falling pressure.

The ages passed; brow and chin moved forward; man walked two-legged upon the earth. Hunter lying in wait, seed-gatherer wandering afield—they came to know vaguely the warnings of wind and cloud. And as fire (the new-found ally) flickered upon the cave-wall, they entrusted their knowledge to language (that great preserver of knowledge), fashioning rhymes and saws and proverbs. But language, which always said too much or too little, was also a great corrupter of knowledge. He who handled words most cunningly was seldom the wisest, but the catchiest proverbs, not the truest survived. (So even yet those who speak English say:

*Rain before seven,
Clear before eleven,*

But those who speak other languages do not say that particular foolishness, not because they are wiser, but because in their speech the two numerals fail to rhyme.)

Then, when many generations had passed, came high-priests and shamans and medicine-men. Self-deceived, stupid followers of tradition, or mere cynics, they beat drums for rain, and cried that the gods were wroth. They sacrificed bullocks, and gashed themselves with knives and lancets before the altars of Baal.

Next, too briefly, came the clean Hellenic mind searching rational truth. "The storm lasted three days," wrote Herodotus. "At last, by offering victims to the Winds, and charming them with the help of conjurers, while they sacrificed to Thetis and the Nereids, the Magians succeeded in laying the storm." And then he added dryly, "Or perhaps it ceased of itself." Plato first used the word *meteorology*, meaning talk of high, celestial things, beyond the realm of air. Aristotle, canny north-country man, shunning such poetic flim-flam, took over the word for the study of all actions of wind, rain, and vapor in the air itself.

Ptolemy recorded his observations systematically, and Hippocrates studied the effect of weather upon his patients. But the Hellenic spirit withered, and the Roman mind was incurious and superstitious. Even the great Virgil commended the heifers and the rooks as divinely inspired weather-prophets, and the keen-witted Horace (more in jest than in earnest, we hope) saw the warning of Jove in an unexpected clap of thunder. Augur, astrologer, and wind-selling witch held sway through long centuries.

At last Galileo questioned nature's abhorrence of a vacuum, and recommended the problem to one of his students for investigation. From this beginning sprang modern meteorology. Temperature, wind, even humidity, man could feel through his own senses and roughly estimate. But pressure, most valuable guide of all, was too subtle for him, until he achieved the barometer. Then at last he came to know the waves and whirlpools, the swirling shallows and stagnant deeps, of that ever-changing ocean of air on the bottom of which the civilizations flourish and decay.

And since the storm knows no boundary of race or continent, men of all nations perforce have labored together to learn the ways of weather. Torricelli, the Italian, invented the barometer. Halley, the Englishman, mapped the winds. Franklin, the American, audaciously grasped the idea of a revolving and traveling storm. Coriolis, the Frenchman, discovered how the earth's own rotation shifts the wind. Buys Ballot's Law derives from a curiously named Dutchman; Dove, the German, stated the laws of storms; Bjerknes, the Norwegian, probed their nature and explained their life-history.

To these and many others man owes it that h

habiles a chain, or tears his flesh in supplication to a storm demon. Ahead. If man can but conquer himself, lies every hope of greater victory. Still farther off, beyond limits of rational prophecy, lies the time when by arts as yet unimagined man may attain that dream of Marfan; witch, his child—not to predict weather, but to control it.

2

A medium-weight truck, unloaded, was being driven northward along one of the secondary highways in the Sacramento Valley. On its floor was lying a piece of two-by-four lumber about two feet long, recently used to block a wheel. The pavement on the secondary highway was not very smooth, and the truck bounced considerably. The two-by-four worked back a little at every jolt until it balanced at the edge. The truck then crossed a badly designed culvert. The two-by-four toppled off, rolled over and slid by the force of its own momentum, and then lay near the edge of the pavement.

In the year 1579 Sir Francis Drake landed on the California coast, and in the same year a cedar tree was sprouting on the lip of a ravine far up in the Sierra Nevada. Where thousands of contemporary seedlings succumbed to the pitiless competition of the mature forest, this particular sprout survived; it grew for more than two centuries under moderately favorable conditions, and attained a thickness of nearly three feet. It was, however, rooted somewhat insecurely, and in the year 1789 a whirlstorm overthrew it. The long trunk toppled across the ravine and downhill; with a shattering crash it struck a ledge of rock, and broke into three pieces.

Decay is slow in the Sierra; nevertheless, the base and top of the tree, having fallen into somewhat moist spots, disappeared before the first emigrant train passed close by, leaving their wagons down the canyon-side with ropes. The central section of the tree, a jagged-ended bole about twenty feet long and two feet in diameter, lay upon the rocky edge, as if upon a prepared foundation, almost insulated from contact with moist earth.

The railroad was put through not a hundred yards uphill from where the bole was lying. Below, along the river, men constructed the highway and the pole lines for telephone and telegraph and electric power. The planes hummed high overhead, and upon winter week-ends an up-ski operated nearby.

The bole had lost its bark, but otherwise still seemed sound timber. Inevitably, however, the slow fire of decay burned within it, and chiefly in the lower parts, which were

in contact with the rock. Since even partially rotted wood is lighter than sound wood, this process of decay caused the gradual rise of that theoretical point called the center of gravity, until the log was in unstable equilibrium. During the last autumn, as decay weakened the fibers along its lower side, the bole had begun to settle downhill, sometimes as much as a hundredth of an inch a day. Every movement in this direction, however small, brought closer by a month or two the moment at which the bole would have to readjust its position.

Moreover, during the past summer, a chipmunk had burrowed beneath, and now lay hibernating comfortably. By removing a pound or two of gravel he had lessened the capacity of the foundation to resist the slowly shifting weight.

"Dirty Ed" was sixteen and a holy terror. He took his .22 rifle, and with a friend called Lefty went down along the marshes of the Bay shore. The two were bad shots, and managed only to splash water in the vicinity of several mud-hens. They thought their ammunition was all used up, and started home; then Ed found one more cartridge at the bottom of his pocket. They looked for a bird, cat, or dog, and then Lefty dared Ed to shoot at a switch-box which loomed up plainly on a pole some fifty yards away. The pole was on the highway along which was passing a continuous stream of traffic. At this particular point, however, the highway dipped into an underpass beneath the railroad tracks. Shooting right across the highway was thus not really very dangerous, and it was a swell thing to say you had done.

Ed sighted, and fired. For once his aim was good, but the sound of the shot obscured the pang with which the bullet pierced the thin steel. The boys serouged down in a gully, in sudden fear that a passing motoreycle-policeman might have seen them. After a minute they went on, not enough interested to investigate the unlikely possibility of whether or not Ed had hit the switch box.

On this day, Tony Airola went out to see how Blue-Boy was getting on. Blue-Boy was not blue, but he was named after the boar in the old Will Rogers movie. Tony was letting him take care of himself for a while just now: it was good weather, and there were plenty of acorns. About half of Tony's ranch was rolling foothill country, and the rest was this steep hillside pitching down into the canyon and bounded at the base by the railroad right of way. It was too steep and rocky to be really a pasture; sheep could manage it well enough, but quite possibly the boar could not. As Tony worked along the hillside a freight train went by, up-grade—a three-bagger. Tony felt he was looking down right into

the top of each of the belching smoke-stacks, just as if he were standing on an over-pass.

Several natural gullies ran down the hillside, and as Tony came to one of these he saw the boar. Blue-Boy looked in good condition. Just now he was busy grubbing for acorns under an oak tree which hung on precariously to the slope. Watching for a minute, Tony decided that a boar was more sure-footed than you would think. Blue-Boy was getting along all right.

3

The storm centered now beneath the Hawaiian Islands and Alaska, somewhat nearer the latter. The dry east winds upon the northern fringe of its circuit swept Kodiak and Dutch Harbor, but the rest of its vast expanse lay over the ocean, and all its rain returned to mingle again with the salt water from which it had been drawn.

The storm had grown still in size, and might now be called mature. If it had centered at Chicago, ships a hundred miles at sea off Hatteras would have tossed before its south winds, and Denver would have been at its opposite edge. From Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico it would have controlled the air, with its rain belt sweeping from Lake Superior to the Gulf. If it had centered over Paris, it would have extended from the Shetland Islands to Algiers. But as an elephant may be large but not among other elephants, so the storm was far from record-breaking among its kind.

Moreover, it was not likely to grow bigger. As most obvious symbol of its maturity, the cold front had overtaken the warm front along a line five hundred miles long, and was rapidly overtaking it along the remaining half. The elimination of the advancing front of warm air meant that no more moist tropical air could enter the storm system, and that, unless some new phase developed, the storm could only exhaust the energy which it already contained, and then die.

But to speak of a healthy man of twenty-five as dying, although in some ways justified, would be counted an overstatement. The man is no longer growing, and his physical condition probably shows a decline. Nevertheless, most of his life and his best years of power lie still ahead. So also the storm actually contained within itself an amount of energy which in human terms was the equivalent of many millions of kilowatt hours. To expend this energy, even if no trick of air movements served to augment it, might take a longer time than the storm had as yet been in existence.

In fact the activity of the storm was still rapidly increasing. Its recent maturity meant that it could no longer glide swiftly and easily as a wave; now, for every foot it advanced

eastward, it bodily carried its air along. The pressure was falling at the center, the rainfall was heavier, the frontal winds had risen to the intensity of strong gales.

4

Above the City the banners still rippled out south-eastward in the steady breeze. In the mountains, looking at the long lakes which stretched off behind the dams, you would have said it was October, for around the receded water-lines lay broad belts of mud, dried hard and cracked in the winter sun.

Osear Carlson owned, under a mortgage, five hundred acres in Tehama County, half pasture, half grain land. On this day he received a letter from the bank; it was worded in polite and impersonal terms, but the upshot of it was that he must pay his overdue interest. Carlson was a kindly man, but seldom gay like his Italian and Portuguese neighbors. Sometimes he was moody; a vague brooding sorrow which was his northern heritage welled up within him from bottomless inexhaustible depths. He cursed God, and in the same minute said there was no God. After receiving the letter Carlson fell into one of his moods. He went out around the ranch to the pasture and looked at the grass which was being eaten off faster than it grew. "Should buy some feed," he thought, "if I had credit." In the wheat field he pulled up a few stalks; they showed no sign of recent growth, but were curled, conserving moisture; he inspected the condition of the soil. "It's too much," was all he said. An hour later, in the barn, they found his body hanging.

The Secretary of the Trade Association was preparing his weekly confidential report for members. He was a university-trained statistician and proud of his scientific detachment. "The market," he wrote, "for cotton-seed meal and other prepared feeds is encouraging and definitely bullish. . . . Valley merchants report marked retail sales resistance, especially in automotive lines. This must be overcome, and several retail centers are planning a Mid-Winter Buying Week. . . . The adverse psychology is attributed in some quarters to augmented taxes and the relief situation. Noted by other reporting agencies is a deficiency of precipitation. Improvement is expected after Congress adjourns."

5

The J.M. was working as chartman that morning. He lacked Whitey's machine-like speed and precision, but he did not let that worry him—just mechanical skill, he thought to himself. Ordinarily he would have looked at the twelve-hour map made up the preceding afternoon, but this

he wanted to see the situation develop from the actual reports instead of getting a premonition from some other person's map. He was sure something was going to happen.

Recording station after station, he could sense the setup. There was no need to wait for the Pacific chart, to find out about Maria. She was close enough now to show, and she was a roarer! The *Byzantion* reported today, after skipping yesterday. A slack ship, if there ever was one! She was plowing head on into Maria, taking the wind right abeam. She reported a strong gale (nine-point intensity) from the south, overcast with rain, and pressure at the even thousand. She would be taking it even worse for the next few hours. Three hundred miles northeast, farther from the center, the liner *Eureka* had 1006, and a five-point southeasterly. Five hundred miles northwest the *Kanaga* reported 993; she was closest of all three to the center, but being to the north and far away from the fronts had only a seven-point gale, north-northeasterly.

After all, Maria was doing just about as expected. But there were some queer things beginning to show up elsewhere on the map—little matters which might not be important. Not even the best meteorologist could tell till he worked out his fronts and isobars. There were definite changes just the same, more than usual. Low pressure at Edmonton, rain, and rising temperature. Light drizzle at Galveston. Fog at Dallas, enough probably to button up the airport. And, wonder of wonders, clear sky on the Alaskan coast—at Sitka and Anchorage and Cordova where it had been raining for weeks—clear sky, and temperatures below freezing. It all pointed him on farther north, and he waited for the Arctic stations; they were late as usual. What about Coppermine? He remembered its 1023 of yesterday.

The Canadian Northwest must be on this page. There was nothing much else left. He let his eye run down the column, and found the Coppermine number. He almost started as he read the pressure—1032. She'd cut loose all right; there'd be plenty happening now.

He filled in the rest of the stations, not surprised now to find that Fort Norman was 1035. He sat back, and with some reluctant admiration watched as the Chief's pencil moved rapidly and deftly among the clutter of notations. Watching the map take shape, the J. M. felt his excitement grow. With every isobar the drama of the situation was clearer.

The Pacific High still stood firm, and also the eastern United States lay beneath another high-pressure area centering at Pittsburgh. But between the two the 1014 isobar showed a tongue of low pressure thrust up sharply from the

tropics, covering Texas and reaching north through Oklahoma into Kansas. Following counterclockwise around the curve of the isobar, warm and moist breezes were blowing inland from the Gulf—thus the drizzle at Galveston and the fog at Dallas.

Farther north the drama was more obvious. Trapped and dying, Felicia lay over Hudson Bay and Ungava. She was not strong enough to break over the high mountains of Greenland; north and south, areas of high pressure blocked her off. But Cornelia had made the crossing of the Rockies, and now, rejuvenated on the Alberta plain, was ready to sweep south, moving again with the speed of a young storm. And beyond, dominating all the north, was the piled-up menace of the polar air. Behind Cornelia's cold front this mass could rush south across the plains, with no mountain range anywhere to check it. What sort of conflict might arise between Maria and the polar air?

He studied the map intently a moment, and decided what was likeliest. The great outflow from the north would deflect Maria from the usual course into the Gulf of Alaska; she would come on due east, smash the Pacific High, and let go her rain along the whole length of California.

"Golly, Chief," he burst out. "It's rain in forty-eight hours, plenty of it."

"Hn-n?" said the Chief, looking up.

The J. M. was embarrassed, interrupting with such childishness: "I'm sorry, Chief, I guess I'm excited."

"Well, why not? You haven't seen as many storms come across that map as I have." Then there was a miracle, for the Chief relaxed a moment from his work. "But don't go throwing out any forty-eight-hour guesses. Storms are hussies, in this part of the world anyway. I've known a lot of them—storms, I mean. You can't trust 'em twelve hours out of your sight." And he went on with his work.

The J. M., the Chief was thinking privately, was something of a whippersnapper, but might have the makings of a good weather-man. Enthusiasm was proper in a youngster, and a forecaster needed imagination—not too much, but some. Rain in forty-eight hours would be his forecast too, if he had to make one that far ahead. Just the same, there were two possibilities which would prevent rain. The Alberta storm might not go south, but go east following that cold storm which was hanging around over Hudson Bay. Or the polar air would follow, and the advancing Pacific storm move against the Alaskan coast as usual. Or the polar air, on the other hand, might sweep southward so violently that it joined with the Pacific High; then the advance would be blocked a thousand miles to the

ornia would have only dry cold winds from the northeast.

In any case the next twenty-four hours offered no problem, and with confidence he began typing off a no-change forecast. Then Whitey shoved a telephone at him.

"You better take this, Chief—sounds bad!"

"Hn-n?" said the Chief, and then he heard someone plenty excited talking over the line.

"Weather Bureau, hello! Hello there! Weather Bureau, Weather—"

"Chief Forecaster speaking."

"Say, we got—This is Brownington Steamship Company. We got a ship in trouble. She just let loose an SOS. The *Eureka* relayed it to us. She's making for her but she'll take six hours. What's the weather like out there?"

"Can you give me the position?"

"Not exactly—the *Eureka* didn't give it. But we'll get it."

"What ship is it?"

"*Byzantion*."

"Don't bother then. We have her position when she reported two hours ago. She must have been all right then. Just a minute—"

But the man on the other end was almost wailing: "For God's sake, hurry. It's mostly a local crew; they got wives and families. The *Register* has an extra getting ready now."

Turning toward the map the Chief bumped into the J. M., dividers and slide-rule in hand.

"I'll have the gradient wind calculated in about—"

"Put that damn thing away!" snapped the Chief. "No, figure it. But get out of my road!"

The *Byzantion* was a slow ship, and once disabled would not move at all. He could figure her still being just about where she was before. But the storm had been tearing down toward her at a rate which would be around forty miles an hour. So the ship would be that much nearer the front. He looked at the close-spaced isobars. The ship's barometer, if anyone bothered to look, would be down around 997 by now; the wind might have risen a full point, maybe more.

"Hello—when she reported, the *Byzantion* had a nine-point wind—about, well, say fifty miles an hour. Now look here—don't tell all this to the reporters or to the families either. But you better know. It's going to get worse. In an hour it'll be blowing a whole gale, sixty miles an hour anyway. Then for another hour it'll be worst of all—gusts running over seventy. After that it'll fall off, but there'll be lots of wind for twelve hours, and a heavy sea after that. The storm out there is plenty big."

"Thank you—" the voice still had a wailing tone. "There isn't anything you can do about it?"

The Chief did not smile, for he recognized the appeal of despair.

"Not a thing. I'm sorry." And then Whitey was holding out another telephone to him. It was the *Register*.

For the next hour the Chief spent most of his time trying to tone down the language of editors. "No, it's not a typhoon. . . . No, it can't be called a hurricane." Since it could do no good, he dodged a public statement as to whether the storm was growing worse.

All the time, as the early sun flooded in at the east windows and the City basked in the calm of a cloudless morning, it was hard to realize that at a distance of a few inches on the map, even in reality only a small fraction of the earth's circumference, some of your fellow-townsmen were battling for their lives on a broken ship, and the front rushing down upon them.

6

"O.K., Jerry, change oil, lubricate, tires, battery. Give 'er the works!"

"O.K. Mr. Goslin. Off from San Francisco again, are you?"

"Sure thing. Starting Sunday, cover all north end of state—first stop, Colusa."

"Fella was tellin' me the drought's getting pretty bad up there."

"It sure is and the luxury trade's not so hot. But still they gotta buy flour—you know—the stuff they keep weevils in. I'm doin' as good as I gotta right t' expect."

"The new tires look swell."

"Are swell too. A guy that drives like I do, gotta have safe tires. Have 'er ready at two."

7

It was hell on the *Byzantion*. The rudder-controls were jammed or smashed, and everything gone haywire, and she was taking them green. The First, best officer they had, had gone overboard, and Johnny the Greek lay white-faced and groaning from a dislocated shoulder, and the cook was burned all over the face. The Old Man wasn't much good, and most likely was hitting the bottle again. And the boats gone or smashed—but then you couldn't have launched them anyway.

But they still kept steam up, and followed orders when there were any, and the radio was working. Sparks said the *Eureka* was coming full-steam. It made you laugh anyway, to think how full-steam in this gale would shake the god-dam first-class passengers; they'd be pu

So, weary and wet and bruised, they hung on minute by minute, waiting for the big ones to hit, and wondering whether she'd start breaking up.

8

Max Arnim turned off the ignition, slipped the clutch, and let the car roll to the gasoline pumps.

"Fill 'er up, Bob—ethyl."

"Oh; hello, Max. I hear you're having a week-end off from Reno—going below—taking Jen down to Frisco."

"You sure hear a lot on this job."

"Sure do. Sounds like a swell party."

"She's stayin' with her sister."

"Oh, sure, sure. Jen's a nice kid. I know. When you leaving Reno?"

"Tomorrow—after work."

"Pretty late—be dark all the way."

"Couldn't get off earlier. Anyway I know old U.S. 40 like a book. We'll pull in to the City around midnight."

9

The J. M. bought a paper and stood at the street-corner, reading. All the Chief's cautious language had been of no use, for the headline stood out:

SHIP IN TYPHOON

His first thought was that the *Byzantion* had it coming—sending in weather reports so irregularly, a slack ship. He read the details.

But more than of the ship, the J. M. thought of the storm. Only four mornings ago he had drawn on the map that tiny closed isobar in the shape of a football. Now, already, Maria was a killer. The papers called her a typhoon; actually (though less violent) she was far greater than any typhoon.

Other people stood at the sunny street-corner reading the same paper. The J. M. felt distant from them. They must be thinking of the battered ship, of the drowned First Officer, of the man with the dislocated shoulder. If they considered the storm at all, they thought only of a sudden and unrelated cataclysm, arisen in a particular part of the ocean to the misfortune of a particular ship. They did not know of Maria's birth and growth, of which way she was moving, or even of what she was. They did not know that now in her massed power, from Alaska to Hawaii, she swept the ocean and ruled the air.

There was a dance at Blue Canyon that Friday night. Usually you wouldn't be having a dance at Blue Canyon in mid-winter; the road would be snowed over, and the only way you could get in or out would be by the railroad. But for this dance (maybe because it was so unusual) a lot of people turned out. From high up on the Pass they came, and from all the way down to Dutch Flat. There were railroad people and Power-Light people and telephone people, and highway people. There were young fellows and girls who worked at the resorts up in the snow-country. There were a few people from little mountain-ranches. And there were some men—pretty well broke—who were just hanging around out of work, knowing that as soon as the storms came the big companies would need extra men for emergencies.

It was a big party, and Rick the lineman went to it. He met a girl, and as soon as he met her he knew there was something about her. He saw that she was not as pretty as lots of girls, but she had good blue eyes that looked just a little strange along with her dark hair and skin.

She was with her sister and her sister's husband, and Rick made her his girl for the evening. They danced, and got along well. And in some way when he talked to her Rick found that he wasn't kidding along or trying to get fresh, the way he usually did. He found himself telling her about how it felt climbing poles and mending wire up on the Trans-continental Lead—serious things like that—and what kind of man was good on the job, and just what some of the tricks were to it.

Once she said, "Isn't it dangerous?" But the way she looked at him and the way she spoke made him feel that really she meant, "Isn't it dangerous for *you*?" When he thought that maybe she meant it that way he felt funny—and not from the whiskeys he'd had.

He didn't really even get her name straight until well along in the evening, and when he was dancing with her sister he felt himself thinking of her just as "the girl."

When it was time to go, she was wearing a hat that covered up the dark hair, but he could see the good blue eyes and the dark-tanned face. Then he wanted to say something free and easy, like "So long, sister, see you in church!" But all he found himself saying was just, "Good-by."

"Good-by" was all she said, too.

Rick wanted to call something after her as she went away, but he felt funny again, and couldn't remember anything that was important enough to say, and all he

think of was "blue eyes in a dark-tanned face" as if it were a song.

11

Before the melting ice disclosed the Pass, there was the River. Once it flowed into the ocean through a canyon. But the land sank and the sea-water flooded in through the hills, drowning that canyon so that it became a strait leading to a land-locked bay. But still the River, drawing its strength from the mountains, running in a hundred loops and reaches, flowed southward through the Valley.

This was the nature of the River during the long dry season. It was lean and dark, and idled from sand-bar to sand-bar. The banks were high and thickly grown with willows; farther back, lay long reaches of marsh with massed growth of tall reeds; next came grassland, and then park-like stretches where grass grew beneath great oak trees. Elk with branching antlers browsed the willows; huge bears dug among the roots for food. And after several ages came a dark-skinned people, building poor huts, snaring fish, and gathering seeds.

But in the wet season the River changed its nature. The clouds hung heavy upon the mountains; the rain fell; and—with a gentle *swish* in the night—the River stirred into life. Where sand-bars had shown yesterday, brown water flowed today. A tree, uprooted somewhere far in the foothills, slid noiselessly by. The bears moved off toward the higher lands, where acorns now lay beneath the oaks. The long-legged elk, good waders and swimmers, were in less hurry, but they too began to move. The dark-skinned people looked out and saw muddy water knee-deep among the willows; then they followed bear and elk. Waist-deep they floundered and splashed through creek and swale and slough toward the oak groves.

Then, like Father Nile himself, the River swelled and rose. Gently, in a thousand places, it overflowed into the tule-swamps. Mile by mile the shallow waters crept across the grassland; water lapped at the oak-roots. From high above, the flying wild duck saw a paradise of wide-stretching, quiet, inland lake, with here and there a grassy island. In long looping parallel lines, the bare willow-tops showing above water forlornly marked the summer channel.

At last, more deadly than flood-waters, the gold-seeking white men came to the lands along the River. After a few seasons, the tall elk, the bears, and the dark-skinned people vanished, and were as if they had never been. Even of the river itself, the white men were contemptuous. First of all, they cast into it the debris of gold-mining: so that even the summer channel clogged. After some years came men called

levees higher. Around other lands shall be lower levees; these lands can be farmed in ordinary years, but in time of high flood they must be overflow-basins and their levees shall not be raised. Finally, broad stretches of land shall have no levees at all; into these great overflow-basins the River can pour, exhausting its fury, and through them as by-passes it can reach the Bay. The land of these by-passes may serve as pasture of sheep and cattle which can be driven behind the levees in time of flood.

It is a truce, but no real peace. Year by year, the white men work upon their levees; also they build dams in the mountains to cut off the full burst of the River's power. Year by year, too, the River frets openly and in secret against the levees, and sometimes still it pours forth over its ancient flood-plain.

FIFTH DAY

TO THE CREW OF the *Byzantion*, clinging to their battered ship, feeling the wind take her and the waves strike like solid masses—to that crew, hour by hour, the storm had been an all-engulfing reality. The *Eureka* had come and stood by, and the very sight and company of her had cheered them, what with the wind and sea beginning to fall also. Things were patched up now. The old tub was sound and no leaks, the jury rudder-controls were working, the Greek's shoulder was back in place, and they were heading south for Honolulu and repairs. Best of all, the storm had blown itself out, and there was only a stiff cold breeze from the north and a choppy, tossing sea.

To the crew the storm had been simple and real, and now was gone. But actually, from hour to hour, what was that storm?

It cannot well be compared to a mountain or a machine or any physical thing, for they exist continuously of the same materials. But a storm constantly draws into itself new air and casts out the old.

In this a storm is like a wave or whirlpool which exists in the water but never of the same water. But a storm is vastly more complicated than any wave or whirlpool.

There is a closer analogy—with a living organism, even with a human being. As a man is conceived in the fierce onset of opposing natures, also a storm begins in the clash

of the dry cold air from the north and the mild moist air of the south. Like a person, a storm is a focus of activities, continuing and varying through a longer or shorter period of time, having a birth, youth, maturity, old age, and death. It moves; in a sense, it reproduces its kind, and even takes in food, exhausts it of energy, and casts out the waste. The storm, to be sure, develops only in a manner determined by its antecedents and environment—but many philosophers think little also of man's apparent free will. As for sensation and consciousness of which we talk much and know little—a storm seems to sheer off from a high-pressure area much as the human hand shrinks from the touched nettle.

But a community or a nation yields a still better analogy. Rome or England may endure through centuries although Romans and Englishmen die and are born hourly. The new storms sprung of the old are more like colonies than children; as with Rome and Constantinople there may be doubt as to which maintains the continuity of empire. The life-cycle of a storm is like that of a nation which from apparent decadence is sometimes renewed into full vigor. Finally a storm, like a nation, has an indefinable abstract existence. Men speak of England when they mean neither its land nor its government nor its people, but merely some symbolic centuries-old ideal. And more, when men think thus, tears come to their eyes, and they march with high hearts to battle. So also in every storm exists a something which meteorologists cumbersomely name "a center of low pressure." This is neither air, nor cloud, nor wind, nor rain—yet, as with a nation, this mere abstraction represents the continuing reality of a storm.

2

From the Arctic islands and the ice-floes of Beaufort Sea, from the tundras and pine-barrens and frozen lakes, the polar air swept southward across the plains. Its overwhelming front rushed onward at fifty miles an hour.

This was the manner of its coming. Before it, there was clear sky, and the sun shining upon new-fallen snow, a soft breeze from the west, moist and not cold. Then at the north was a line of high-banked, slate-gray cloud, and the rumble of thunder. Next, suddenly, the clouds darkened the sky, the north wind struck frigidly, and the air was filled with furious snow.

All day Friday the line of that front across Alberta and Saskatchewan at Edmonton: just before the winter storm-gary. In the open the loss all manifest

nity or even of safety. From the Rockies to Lake Winnipeg animals and men alike sought shelter. The blizzard held sway.

About midnight the front approached the international boundary just north of Havre, Montana. No immigration officers demanded passports; no customs officials searched for contraband. Although the Weather Bureau had given warning, not even a hastily mobilized regiment of the National Guard held the border. At the very least, the Department of State might have sent a sharp note to Ottawa, warning that the Dominion Government would be held strictly accountable for damage done by the Canadian air.

Reasonable expectation could only be that a hundred or more citizens of the United States would lose their lives in the cold wave, and that wreckage of property would reach millions. Indirectly, through pneumonia and other means, the loss of life would run into many hundreds and the sum of such items as increased consumption of fuel, snow-removal, and delays in transportation would total an appalling figure. Yet the United States of America (often called by its citizens the greatest nation of the earth) merely cowered before the Canadian invasion.

The northern air crossed the border just after midnight on Saturday morning; by daybreak it had occupied much of Montana and North Dakota, and was advancing upon Minnesota, South Dakota and Wyoming.

3

Beyond the window-panes was again the blank distress of the winter morning. From the teletype-room seemed to come, minute by minute, a wilder confusion of staccato clicks and ringing bells.

Working on the chart, the J.M. felt his throat grow tight with excitement. Maria was driving in hard. He had no need to wait for the Chief's isobars. Along the southwesterly sea-lane, from San Francisco to Honolulu, the usual string of ships had reported from within a few miles of each other; one had fair weather, but those near the middle had rain, and wind running up to forty-mile gales. That could only mean that the edge of the near-by circular storm moving in from the west had cut right across the ship-lane. He could even locate exactly Maria's single remaining front, for by luck two ships had reported from within a few miles of each other; one had had a northwest, the other a southwest wind, sure sign that the advancing front lay right between.

Low pressure (1001) at Winnipeg—that would be Cornelia rushing southeast. Low pressure (1009) at Corpus Christi—that meant a weak storm developing on the Texas

coast; it had begun to show the day before. Towering high pressure (1044) at Fort Simpson in the Klondike. Clear skies and snappy cold along the usually drenched Alaskan coast. And most startling of all, the sudden fall of temperatures behind Cornelia's cold front—over all the Canadian plains and south into Montana and North Dakota. Williston reported twenty-five below, Calgary thirty-seven, Edmonton thirty-nine, Dawson fifty-eight.

Yes, Maria would come driving in hard; even the temperature over the Yukon was an indication.

Then the J.M. started suddenly, for at his elbow was the Old Master. Wraith-like he had slipped in, and now was looking at the maze of figures which covered the map.

"Good morning, sir," he said.

"Good morning," said the J.M. Then thinking he had been too abrupt, he added awkwardly: "You're out early."

"I cannot sleep much. I am getting old. I like to see the map."

He stood there blinking his old eyes, and the Chief moved in and began to draw fronts.

Only now and then was the old man's sight clear enough for him to see the figures. The red, blue, and purple lines which they put on maps nowadays were, he thought, very confusing. Still, he could make out a well-developed storm over Winnipeg.

"Well, sir, how does it look this morning?" said the Chief.

"You have not finished the map," said the old man, and his shaky voice sounded reproachful. Then he went on simply: "There will be rain. I have learned that even the longest droughts come to an end." He was not looking at the map, but seemed to be staring somewhere far off.

The Chief looked across the map at the J.M., and they smiled at the way the Old Master talked. The Chief's pencil was moving deftly; the map was shaping up.

"And what do you think of it?" said the Chief to the J.M. He was drawing the youngster out, not asking advice; but he saw immediately that the J.M. took the question seriously.

happen if he went to the typewriter and tapped off RAIN on the forecast blank.

That single word would be about as big a news-story as could break in California. Thousands of people would change their plans; hundreds of industries, big and little, would make adjustments. Money would be spent, wisely and foolishly. The very process of adjustment to that single word would mean damaged property and jeopardized lives. Then, if the rain did not come, everything would be ridiculous anti-climax, with people blaming the weather-man.

Say that he wrote FAIR or even UNSETTLED, and the rain came. Then people would go on with their fair-weather plans, and would be caught wide open. His error might mean millions of dollars loss of property and the snuffing out of more lives than a man liked to think about.

There was another point too. In the old days the Weather Bureau made the only forecasts, and people were charitable. But now the air-lines and even some other big corporations had their own meteorologists—bright young fellows trained in technical schools, fresh with all the latest theories, like his own J.M., but with more experience. They talked a jargon about isallobaric ascendants and austausch coefficients; it made the Chief nervous. They referred to a three-day-old polar air-mass as if it were a chick they had seen hatch from an egg. There were even some private agencies selling weather information, persuading their clients that it was better than what the Weather Bureau gave away free. Those fellows, it seemed to the Chief, stuck together. When he made a mistake, they pounced on it; when they made mistakes, they argued themselves out. They called him, the Chief knew, "that old fuddy-duddy." As he looked at the map, he grew hot thinking of it. "Salesmen," he thought, "not meteorologists!" Then he stopped himself, for he knew that they were meteorologists, and good ones too. He must be a better one, not call them names. He must work to match them in theory, and in the meantime must pit against their equations and diagrams the experience of thirty-five years, which had imprinted upon his memory the pictures of hundreds of weather situations against their dozens. "I can't maybe remember Grant's inauguration," thought the Chief, "but those babies can't remember Coolidge's."

So today he doubly checked all the possibilities. He quickly studied the chart of upper-air winds and temperatures, and the maps showing rise and fall of pressure and temperature. Then he returned to his own map.

The telephone rang. "It's the *Register* for the forecast," said Mr. Ragan.

"Hn-n? Tell 'em to wait ten minutes."

The Chief sighed, and thought of the Old Master's favorite quotation: "The duties of this office permit little rest and less hesitation." Well, ten minutes was enough.

From his point of view on the California coast, the Chief saw himself on neutral ground at the center of four great forces. What happened would depend upon their relative strength and the resulting way in which they shoved one another around. Just to his south, the Pacific High still stood; it was probably the weakest of the four and was retreating, but it still possessed much capacity for passive resistance. Far to the north the great mass of polar air was rushing southeasterly across the prairies. Its most southerly isobar, however, bent around Seattle, and formed a disturbing southwesterly point. If it spread farther, this bulge might block the storm away from the coast. The third force was the storm over Winnipeg; its indications were definitely favorable. The fourth force was the storm which was approaching the coast; it too seemed to have plenty of energy and to be moving in the right direction.

With a slight exception, all the immediate forces thus seemed to be working for rain. But the Chief knew that more distant forces could have their influence—the new storm on the Texas coast, for instance. It too happened to be a favorable indication. There must be many forces even beyond the range of his map. Something happening anywhere in the temperate zone, in the northern hemisphere, or for that matter anywhere in the world, might falsify his forecast. But that was only a possibility, and a man must forecast probable, not possible, weather.

He made his decisions, and his actions suddenly came to have a continental, almost a god-like, sweep.

"Hey, Whitey," he called, "get on the telephone, and order up storm-warnings on the coast—Point Arena to North Head." He turned to his typewriter.

But the nearest telephone rang before Whitey could get to it. "It's the *Register* again," he said. The Chief committed himself to the inevitable.

"Complete forecast in five minutes. But tell 'em to set the headlines and get ready—it's RAIN."

4

In the engraving-room Whitey worked rapidly at the chalk-plate for the daily weather map. The room was sticky and acrid with the smell of the type-metal already melted for the casting. But the map would not reach many of the subscribers until the afternoon delivery, and already would be old.

—radio says there's a rain coming. I don't
know whether. There's quite a few young ladies
in the Region. Page 100.)
was expected. Large Storm Near Cairo. The U. S.
Weather Bureau this morning forecast that rain would fall
heavily throughout the central and northern parts of the
country beginning late Sunday afternoon. A storm of large pro-
portions is now centered a thousand miles west of Cape
Mexico and is advancing rapidly. Officials of the Weather
Bureau declined to state what would be the duration of the
storm and the amount of precipitation, other than to say
that it would be considerable.

Valley farmers in those regions which have been suffering
heavily from drought are jubilant. Snow-sports enthusiasts
were today preparing to return to their favorite haunts.
In the meantime, while California enjoyed its accustomed
sun, reports from Montana indicated widespread suffering
in the wake of a cold wave. Thermometers were tumbling
with lowest temperature in the United States reported from
Havre at twenty-nine below zero. Three people were lost and
feared dead in a blizzard near Wolf Point, Montana. (For
details, see Page A-4, Col. 3.)

EXTRY! EXTRY! EXTRY! ! ! Well, folks, this is
Old-Time Newsy calling you the headlines over KTEX.

And the first big news this morning for all you folks
California is that there's goin' to be rain. Yessir, rain.
Spell it—R-A-I-N. Those little drops of water coming
—“little” maybe, but plenty of 'em. That's what the
Weatherman says. So get out the umbrella and the old
shoes. But you people in the South, don't get excited
showers down your way. Now, of course, Your Old
Newsy doesn't guarantee this rain; he's just bringing you
report. But what I say is any report in a storm!
folks! Don't mind me; it's just a way I have.

“O.K., oil's O.K. Say, how about lettin' me make
deal on some new front tires; those old ones are
smooth. There's a rain comin'.”

“Sure, so is Fourth of July.”

“Naw, I mean it. Just got the news on the radio
“Say, is that right? Well, in that case I better
Got a roofin' job on my hands. Thanks.”

“Gimmie a beer. Say, what's this about it goin'
“No, Billy, you cannot plan to go with Bo
say it's going to rain.”

"It's going to rain."

"Going to rain."

"RAIN!"

5

There was a story, the L.D. remembered, about a chief-of-staff so well prepared in advance that when awakened with news of war he merely said, "Look in Drawer B," and went back to sleep. The L.D. felt much the same that morning, after he had read the forecasts from both the Weather Bureau and the company's own meteorologist. Somewhere in his maze of high-voltage wires, his power-houses, and his dams there would be trouble, but everything was ready.

Just to be doing something he called up French Bar. Johnny Martley's slow-spoken voice, transmitted along two hundred miles of wire, assured the L.D. that in that region machines and equipment were ready, and men mobilized.

"A couple of the boys was down to the City, but they just got back. We may need 'em, too. Say, they said they saw you down there, goin' into the building."

"Yeh?—you talk as if I were the two-headed man or something. Why didn't they speak to me? I like to see the boys. Come to think of it, I've never even seen you, Johnny."

"Hell, this system is so big you couldn't meet everybody in it if that was your full-time job."

"Well, O.K., Johnny. Just wanted to see how things were."

But the L.D. was thinking he would really like to meet Johnny. It was crazy knowing so many people by telephone only. Johnny's record was good, and the L.D. liked his slow-spoken manner, suggestive of reserve power.

Air-Lines depended principally upon its own meteorologists, and their forecast too was for rain. The Chief Service Officer called up the Commercial Department and told them that cancellation must be considered likely for all flights scheduled after two P.M. on Sunday, and purchasers of tickets should be so informed.

The Railroad considered its schedules inviolable, no matter what the weather. "There comes a time," the white-haired General Manager liked to say. "when the buses are blocked and the planes can't fly—but we go through just the same." The railroad had weathered so many storms that one more meant nothing further in the way of preparation. But

as staff officers moved to their posts before a battle, so the Assistant Divisional Engineer and the Chief Trainmaster went up by Number 77 out of Sacramento that morning and dropped off at Emigrant Gap and Norden to take charge of track-clearance.

The District Traffic Superintendent always got a little nervous when a big storm was coming and he thought of all his long-distance wires out there exposed to whatever hit. This morning he called Chicago, but Chicago had the news already of course, and there was nothing to talk about. Then, mostly out of nervousness, he called the Plant office. Plant said that they were sending some extra men up along U.S. 40 to be ready in case things went bad on the Pass.

6

The little green truck with the telephone insignia on its side hummed merrily up U.S. 40, past the two-thousand-foot elevation marker, and on. Inside, it gave a paradoxical impression of cluttered neatness, everywhere all kinds of diverse things lay ready at hand in a little space—coils of wire jostled spare insulators, and tools touched skis and snow-shoes.

Rick, driving the truck, was happy. He was going up to play what he knew was a man's game, and in the next few days he would play it lone-handed. He liked the deep-snow country on the Pass, and working on the Transcontinental Lead meant more than just mending local wires in some foothill town.

And also Rick was happy because he had fallen in love, or dangerously close to it. He kept thinking of the girl he had danced with the night before. Sometimes he felt almost as if he had a few drinks in him, and he swung the curves a little absent-mindedly so that the outside tires went off the pavement and he could hear the gravel fly.

It was good to be a man, and to work on a job that called on you to do things that were a little dangerous, and to have "blue eyes in a dark-tanned face" to think about, and to breathe the clean mountain air sweeping in from the pine woods, feeling cooler and snappier the closer you got to the Pass.

7

The General was not exactly making a tour of inspection, but in his capacity as Flood-Control Co-ordinator he found himself unable to drive anywhere in the Sacramento Valley without observing river-channels and levees. So he stopped his car at the Landing, and went out on the bridge. He

walked a little stiff-jointedly, and he limped with his right leg. He stopped at the middle of the bridge and looked out upstream. The water stood at nine-point-seven on the gauge. None of the gauge-readings had varied much in the last three weeks; a certain amount of snow-melting in the mountains was compensating for the lack of rain. The General let his eyes follow along the bridge to the other side of the river where from the slope of the levee in big black letters CABLE CROSSING stared back at him. In its shrunken stage the river was only about sixty yards wide, and the levees sloped up like high natural ridges. Their crests, as the Colonel well knew, were at the thirty-two-foot level, more than twenty-two feet above the present water surface. Penned in between the levees the river seemed puny, as if flowing in a canyon. But the General wasted no pity on the river—not when the forecast was RAIN.

8

The manager of the Palace Department Store read the forecast in the morning paper and immediately went into action. For the coming week he had planned an emphasis upon hats, baby-carriages, and bed-sheeting. He shifted it to ski-clothing, rain-equipment, and blankets.

The Director of the Observatory gave up his plans for some lunar photography.

The proprietor of the Gaiety Amusement Park shrugged his shoulders. He had gambled his last dollar on a fair weekend. Rain would break him. He called up his lawyer, and said he would probably have to make an assignment on Monday.

In the Eagle Lumber Yard the owner kept his men working over-time on Saturday afternoon, and picked up two extra helpers. He had a lot of finished lumber in the yard, and to save it from getting wet and warping was hundreds of dollars in his pocket.

When the advertising manager of the *Register* checked up the results he decided that the paper had broken about even as far as the rain was concerned. The real estate companies had called off most of the advertising because they knew how cold and gloomy empty houses seemed in the rain, even if you could get people out to look at them. But he had five new ads from resorts in the snow-country, and a tire company had broken out with a half-page announcing non-skid tread.

he effects of the forecast tended to spread out until they formed long chains. The shrewd proprietors of several restaurants called up the factory, and reduced their orders for ice-cream. The manager of the factory and his needs for milk and cream lessened, and passed on word to the dairy. Since the cows could not be forced to operate, the dairy company diverted the surplus to its subsidiary corporation which manufactured butter and cheese. The manager then hired two extra men, whose lives on the strength of the prospective jobs spent more freely than usual at one of the smaller retail stores. The retailer optimistically imagined an up-swing of business, and said he would take the new car over which he had been hesitating. At this point, however, the chain of effects turned back upon itself and ended. For the store-keeper, later in the day, read the forecast, and believing that his retail business always suffered in rainy weather, he called up the automobile salesman and cancelled the order.

9

The great banners above the City hung at their poles, or flapped languidly, now this way, now that way. No longer did they ripple out bravely before the northwest wind, for in the night that wind, dominant through many weeks, had faltered and then died. Blue and white, red and yellow, maroon, crimson and black, they no longer flaunted proudly above the pearl-gray city against the clean blue of the sky. Now from west and south and southeast in uncertain puffs the shifting airs served only to wrap the banners around the poles and tangle them with the halyards. Caught at the calm center among far-off mighty actions, the banners flapped and fell, symbols of interregnum and coming change.

10

If there had been a moderately high range of mountains running east and west along the Canadian border the cold wave would largely have spent itself at that barrier or been diverted; the existence of such a mountain wall would have been a more potent factor in American history than the institution of slavery. But the isolated Black Hills only impeded the advance slightly; the polar air swept around them reunited its front, and went on.

By noon of Saturday temperatures had fallen far below zero over all the northern plains. Five persons, foolish and unlucky, had been caught in the open and frozen to death; more than fifty others had been killed or injured in accidents attributable to the blizzard.

Rushing toward the south and southeast, along a front

of a thousand miles, all through Saturday afternoon the polar swept onward. About one o'clock Duluth went under, along with Pierre, and Casper; within an hour, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Cheyenne. As the sun grew low, the blizzard hurtled upon Sioux City, North Platte, and Denver. In the winter twilight the lights came on in Milwaukee, Des Moines, and Omaha; they shone for a few minutes and then in the flying snow were blotted out. Next in line before the fury of the North lay Chicago, Kansas City, and Pueblo.

Throughout the day the polar air had advanced more than eight hundred miles southeastward. It had warmed slightly, and because of mixing with the more southerly air its line of demarcation was not quite so sharp. But still its temperature was below zero, and its northwest winds at forty miles an hour whirled before them a blinding and cutting blast of snow.

Of old time, that broad country of the plains knew raiders, but none more furious than this. Swifter than Sioux, more terrible than Assiniboine, more pitiless than Arapaho, it swept upon town and farmstead.

SIXTH DAY

MAN IS OF THE AIR, but through dim ages that which-was-to-be-man lived not in the ocean of the air but in the ocean of the water. And even yet the saltness of blood is as the saltness of the sea.

Natural man, living in the air, is unconscious of the air, as the fish of the water. But man having left the ocean behind grows conscious of water, and acknowledges his dependence. Also, perhaps, in racial memory he strains backward through mythology and religion toward that time when water, as in the womb, was his all-surrounding element.

In the Christian Bible the theme of water runs from the second verse of *Genesis* to the last chapter of *Revelation*. As symbol it is multiform—water of purification, water of separation, water of baptism, water of life.

Even more is water the theme of that ancient religion of nature which pervades so many lands—of Tammuz piteed and dying, of Adonis lamented, of the Freeing of the Waters, of the Waste Land and the wounded Fisher King. For if Adonis come not again or if King Pelles not be healed of his wound in the thighs, then the rains fall not and the waters flow not, neither do the tamarisks blossom nor the heads

form on the barley, nor the cattle bow themselves and bring forth. Nay, if the waters not be freed, no man has power to beget the child within the womb. Then man is afraid of his own weakness, and the land of the Dolorous Stroke lies waste; there is no rain, and only far off the crackle of dry thunder.

But if the waters are freed, then the land shall flourish. That which was withered and laid low shall again stand on high; the seed is shed in fertile ground, and the earth no longer lies parched and dry; and children play by the doorsteps.

The land lies tense, awaiting water and release. If only the rain come, then shall all be whole.

2

"Well, Jen, Jen! I *thought* I heard a ear, and I came right out."

The sisters fell into each other's arms, and kissed.

"And this is Max Arnim, I guess. (Jen never *thinks* of introducing anyone.) Was it a nice drive down from Reno?"

"Yes, fine, thanks. Where'll I put Jen's suitcase?"

"Right here in the hall. Won't you come in for a while?"

"Oh, no, thanks. It's after midnight. I've got to get to my friend's."

When he had gone, Jen had to tell her married sister everything about him; only, as she said, there wasn't anything to tell—that is, anything. Dot watched her; the little sister, she decided, was mostly chubby and wholesome-looking, but rather pretty too, especially with the copper glint in her light brown hair.

3

Standing on some miraculous point of lookout, possessing more than human vision, the Chief saw clearly the far reach of the Bay. Blue and quiet it lay in the sunshine. On its surface, with breeze just enough to fill their sails, moved hundreds of pleasure craft—yawls and ketches, star-boats, and snipe-boats, little home-made pumpkin-seeds. Then suddenly a great black cloud arose, covering all the southeastern sky, and the little boats turned for shore. But the storm struck, and they were overwhelmed. The bodies washed ashore where women stood screaming. Then upon the Chief fell a sense of unutterable shame and guilt, for he remembered that he had seen that great storm dominating all the map, and yet in some moment of incredible blindness, he had forecast fair weather and on his word all those pretty craft had sailed out upon the Bay. And always, he knew—as he felt himself sink-

ing into the pit of madness—that he would carry with him the horror of that sight and of the screaming.

He awoke writhing, the pulse drumming in his ears. "Same old nightmare," he thought, and wondered whether other forecasters had the same dream. He lay tense and shaken; his heart still raced. At such moments he always decided that he must resign, that he could no longer carry such responsibility of life and death. He felt bitter—at ships which failed to report, at ships with faulty barometers, at the vast spaces of ocean with no ships at all, at scanty appropriations, at the public which failed to realize the difficulties under which the Weather Bureau worked.

To calm himself, he got up and turned on the light. His alarm clock pointed to three-ten, and ticked stolidly on. But the worry about the forecast which had formed his dream did not leave him. Like any rustic, he leaned from the window and looked at the sky. There was not a star in sight. "She's coming all right," he said to himself, for he felt the southerly wind, and knew that during the night the far-flung cloud-deck of the storm must have moved in. First of all would have come the little banners of cirrus, scattered wisps of ice-crystals, miles high; after them the high, wide-spreading cirrus haze; and then the thicker and lower clouds of the middle air, water-droplets held suspended as in fog, dense enough to obscure the moon and let even the dullest person know that the storm was nearing. From the intensity of the night he judged that this dark layer of altostratus now covered the sky.

He began dressing. Too late to go back to bed, he said to himself; but he knew that really he wanted to get to the office and see what was happening.

The barometer had started to fall, and most of northern California reported cloud. But there was as yet no rain at any of the land stations. By the time the Chief had got the map drawn, he was back to normal.

Yesterday he had felt himself at the central calm of four great atmospheric forces. Today there were only three. The Pacific High, dominant for so many weeks, had taken a knock-out blow from the in-driving storm. The other great storm which had moved down from Alberta centered now over Indiana, and held in the swirl of its winds all the United States east of the Rockies. Behind its cold front the blizzard was engulfing Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle. But this cold wave covering all the interior of the Continent was only one discharge from the vast high-pressure area which dominated the Canadian Northwest and the interior of Alaska.

For so immense was the accumulation of cold air that it was forcing a way across and around the high mountains of Alaska and reaching southward in a long tongue across the Pacific behind the storm which was just approaching California. As for that storm, the Chief decided, it was growing old, but still had plenty of fight left in it, and was in a situation where it might well be rejuvenated.

Today's decision was easy; it really did nothing but confirm yesterday's; and that forecast had already been confirmed once in the afternoon bulletin issued by the Associate Forecaster. Rain, the Chief decided, would begin during the afternoon and continue throughout the next day; snow in the mountains, unsettled in southern California. Fly storm warnings, Cape Flattery to Point Conception; small-raft warnings south of Conception. He checked off the rest of his district—snow flurries in Nevada, rain in southern Oregon, clear and cold over the northern plateau and in western Washington. This was going to be one of those rare times when California had rain and Seattle had sun.

"Well, Whitey," he said to his chart-man, "There'll be plenty happening in California today and tomorrow."

4

The two-by-four which had fallen from the truck still lay at the edge of the pavement. No highway patrolman passed that way, and no driver thought the piece of wood worth stopping to remove. Catching sight of it as their ears came over the hump of the culvert, some quickly reacting drivers swerved to the left. Others, slower witted or more careless, drove right across it. One of these was a truck-driver with a load of cow-manure, and as he bumped over it, a few pounds of manure sloughed off, and spilled beside the two-by-four.

5

Far at sea the rain-belt moved steadily shoreward, but already the forerunning wave of pain had reached the land. Old lumberjack joints grown stiff in the dripping of the redwood forests twinged and throbbed. From Cape Disappointment to Point Arguello overworked mothers wineed with headaches. Nerve-ends of leg-stumps tingled. Old wounds of the Argonne ached again. In a moving belt a hundred and fifty miles before the rain, renewed tortures prevailed in the hurt and maimed-limbs of men.

6

The congregation was poor and the church was bare; but the warm imagery of the preacher's words illumined it. Yet he prayed simply, only using for his prayer the words rich in

ancient memories. For he too was of the land; he knew that the grass was withering, and that his people suffered and were afraid.

"And if it be Thy will, O Lord, on this Thy day, send us the rain. Even now Thy clouds pass over us, speak the word and let fall the water that is above the earth. Let Thy clouds also drop water as when Thou wentest out of Seir. Send rain for the wheat and for the barley, that the tender ears may form. Send rain for the beasts of the field. As of old when Thy people thirsted in the desert Thou didst command Thy servant Moses to smite the rock in Horeb and the waters did flow forth, so raise Thy hand, O Lord, we beseech Thee."

7

Over Alberta and Saskatchewan and Montana now rested a vast calm. In a steel-blue sky the low sun of the short winter day shone without seeming warmth, not compensating for the heat lost during the long clear night. Havre reported forty-nine below zero. The northern plain was temporarily a cold pole from which new outbursts of frigid air might be relayed on.

Southeastward the cold front speeded along. It burst upon Cincinnati and Louisville, plastering hard-driven snow against poles and buildings; it swept on toward Huntington and Nashville. But in this country of woodland and tangled hills the front lost its knife-life edge; the flying snow no longer cut with blizzard-force. Even west of the Mississippi the Ozarks broke the sweep of the wind, before it reached Little Rock and Shreveport. Only as the front bore southward across the vast plains of Texas could the storm maintain something of its full fury.

That morning in Abilene and Fort Worth and Dallas men looked up and saw the high blue wall of cloud sweeping down upon them. In its long journey the polar air had grown warmer, so that the Texans called the storm a norther more often than a blizzard. Even so, the temperatures dropped from well above freezing to close to zero, and with the whistling wind and the driving snow mid-Texas became suddenly a province of the Arctic. People battling their way along gale-swept streets quoted the grim proverb: *Between Texas and the North Pole there's only a barbed-wire fence for a wind-break.* In San Antonio and Houston men made ready at the wharves of Galveston and Corpus Christi seemed to look to their mooring-ropes; in the orange-groves of Brownsville there was setting-out of smudge-pots and lighting of fires. And radio east the warning on to shipmasters far out upon the Gulf.

All day, from Cape Mendocino to Point Conception, the south wind blew steadily and grew stronger. The slow Pacific groundswell rolled in heavily, wave by wave, breaking white over ledge and reef, tossing spray high on the rocky points, crashing solidly on the long beaches. Hour by hour the cloud-deck grew lower and thicker and darker; swift-blown seud sped beneath the low stratus, seeming to skim the wave-crests. In the early afternoon the wind grew stronger. The mild air was dank with moisture.

There was neither thunder nor lightning, nor any gale. Such petulant displays might be left to smaller storms, just as a small man wins attention by showing off, but a great man keeps his dignity. This, indeed, was no local thunder-storm, no tornado spitefully leveling a town here and yet so petty and evanescent that it dissipates before reaching the next county.

Far around the great circle, a third of the world away, this storm had taken shape. It was a part—and not a small part—of a vast and complex system of atmospheric forces covering the hemisphere. No longer was it a young storm racing its thousand miles a day. Now, powerful and sedate in maturity, it moved with the steady, sure pace of majesty. Along a line of hundreds of miles, its rain belt pressed upon the coast. What need to announce such a coming by showy fireworks? Only, along the beaches, the vast unhurried pounding of the groundswell made known that far off some great force moved upon the waters.

The clouds were lower still; mist veiled the tips of the headlands; and there was rain. No tropical downpour, no sudden burst of heavy drops. First, so fine was the rain, it was as if the low-lying mist had merely swooped a little lower. Then for a moment it was gone. But it came again. A wind gust took the falling drops and swirled them out like a wisp of fog. Minute by minute, unhurrying, the rain grew thicker and more steady.

Along all that straight mountainous coast, five hundred miles from Mendocino to Conception, there was rain. Rain on the rocks and the headlands, rain on the beaches and lagoons, rain on the high grass-slopes. Rain sweeping inland, stippling the surface of the shrunken rivers, swirling mistily up the canyons among the redwood trees, cresting the ridges.

Broken into mile-deep turbulent eddies, impeded a little, nevertheless across the mountains as across the ocean the rain-bearing air moved irresistibly ahead, controlled by cos-

mic forces far too powerful to be blocked even by the high ridges of the western shore.

Driving in parallel with the coast, the rain had struck along five hundred miles almost at the same moment. But now the rain-belt lost all its simplicity. The ridges and canyons here of themselves impeded and there aided, and still elsewhere caused great waves within the air. Here, around some rocky shoulder the wind howled at gale-force; a mile away in a sheltered corner the leaves hung limp on the bay-trees. On the windward slopes of steep ridges the rain was a thick torrent, but in long leeward valleys where the air-currents swooped downward, it slacked off to a drizzle. Following open valleys, long arms of rain ran miles ahead, and once two of these curved together and, meeting, momentarily surrounded by rain a narrow island of dryness.

So, on a scale small enough for men to see, a wave rushes into a rocky cove. Here it pours through the gaps, there it beats against a larger stone, elsewhere it rushes ahead and then turns for a moment back upon itself. Yet always the wave rises and pushes on, until suddenly the whole cove lies beneath the weltering surface of the water, and the rocks are covered and impotent. Thus too the rain-belt drove onward, overwhelming the hills.

Mile by mile the rain moved swiftly inland, toward the broad valleys where the clods were dry and the earth lay cracked and men waited for the freeing of the waters.

9

All day the Chief Service Officer at Bay Airport had bent over the weather charts and asked advice of the meteorologist, waited for the latest reports and talked with every pilot who landed. What about cloud conditions over the coastal stations? What about velocities and windshifts at ten thousand feet? Any icing yet?

The 12:45 from Seattle came in ten minutes late. The pilot had fought headwinds all the way, and reported rough air and bad conditions generally over the Siskiyous.

The CSO cancelled the seven o'clock and one A.M. flights for Seattle, and felt easier. It was going to be no night to have planes out feeling their way around Mt. Shasta and fighting turbulence over the Siskiyous with probably every airport south of Seattle reporting low ceiling.

The rain commenced at the airport about two o'clock, but there was a high enough ceiling, and the two-thirty plane from Los Angeles landed a few minutes early. The pilot had had tail-winds, good visibility even over the Tehachapis, and nothing to worry about. Fresno and Bakersfield reported good

ugh ceilings and only moderate winds. Without qualms the CSO sent the three-o'clock off to Los Angeles. But conditions were going to get worse, not better. Minute by minute as he looked from his windows he seemed to see the clouds settling lower and the veil of rain growing thicker. Already under the thick overcast the winter daylight was dim; the night would make no difference to the storm in the upper air, but it would mean lower ceilings over the airports. Word came that the seven-forty-five from Seattle was ordered grounded at Medford. The pilot of the four-fifteen transcontinental reported by radio that he was flying by instrument, over the Sierras at twelve-thousand feet through clear air with cloud strata above and below him.

The CSO called the Ticket Office. "Tell them we expect the five-o'clock for Los Angeles to be O.K. I'm going to let the five-thirty transcontinental start, if nothing happens between now and then, and I don't think it will. Don't promise anything on six-thirty and eight for Los Angeles. I still expect to get the nine o'clock transcontinental off all right, but we may have to skip Reno and make it non-stop to Salt Lake. And that finishes off tonight." The CSO looked over the field. The lights had come on already. The great transcontinental plane from Salt Lake City was coming in for a landing. "She's here all right anyway," he thought. "I'll have to talk to the pilot." The drifting rain seemed thicker and harder blown in the gathering darkness. He wished suddenly that all his planes were safely tucked in for the night. "Accident of God!" he thought ironically. "Fire, and hail; snow and vapors, stormy wind fulfilling his word!" Over thousands of square miles the rain was falling, and wind was swirling, and clouds were creeping closer and closer to earth. Over the hump at Donner Pass snow was falling thickly, and perhaps in the air over the treacherous Tehachapis there were ice conditions. He checked off his four enemies—turbulence, radio disturbance, low ceilings. Also he had his cunningly built planes, powerful engines, de-icing devices, radio-beams, trained pilots. But most of all he counted on his stations, and radio which let him know the weather any minute at land at some mid-way point, or even to turn back and safety at the airport from which they had started.

10

"Well, good-by, Jen; good-by, Mr. Arnim. Drive car. How you youngsters tear around—get in after midnight start back that evening. It's a shame this rain had to up and spoil your trip. It'll make you pretty late home. Remember me to my friends in Reno. Good-

"Good-by, Dot!"

"Good-by."

The car moved off down the street, and Dot waved from the doorway. That Max Arnim's a nice boy, she thought: Jen could do a lot worse. Maybe they really were interested. Through the drifting rain she saw the moving car and the momentary dull marks it left on the shining wet asphalt. It turned the corner and was gone.

11

If he was too late getting to Colusa, he would not be able to see his man, and might miss the sale of flour he was expecting. He had been delayed in leaving San Francisco, and also the rain had slowed him down. Now it was growing dark; he pushed on as fast as he could, driving the car on the wet road. But he had confidence in his own skill and he knew that his car was in perfect condition.

He was on the look-out for Tom and George's Service Station where he was to leave the main highway and take the cutoff. He did not want to miss it, for he could save five minutes at least. Nevertheless, he was right there before he noticed, and not daring to throw on his brakes too hard because of the wet road, he ran by. For a moment he thought that he might as well go through on the main road: then, being a man of set purpose, he backed up to the service station and turned north into the secondary highway.

Keeping at fifty an hour he drove a mile northward. Then just as he passed over a rather high culvert, he saw sharply in the glare of his headlights some little obstruction at the edge of the pavement—a stick of wood with some iron bands on it. By quick automatic reaction he swerved to the left, his wheels skid, and straightened out.

But the film of sodden manure which had spread across the wet pavement was so slippery that the car could get no grip. The car skidded off the road, rolled over twice and landed on its top with a terrific crash. With a clatter of a young animal, the car—its four wheels in the air—remained for a moment, and then was still.

12

Snow had been falling for an hour or so, and two or three inches lay upon the upper reaches of Highway 47. Already the yellow tow-car from Truckee had had to pull out a couple, stuck in the ditch at Windy Point. Right now, in front of the Maintenance Station, a car had stopped, and its driver was fumbling with jack and chains: he looked very uncomfortable, half-blinded by the swirling snow, with the white powder sifting in around the collar of his overcoat.

bar the light-ship rolled and pitched; Mile Rocks guarded the Golden Gate. Montara, Pigeon Point, Año Nuevo of the New Year, Santa Cruz of the Holy Cross, Point Pinos of the Pine Trees, Point Sur of the South, Piedras Blancas of the White Rocks, its tapering white tower wreathed in rain. San Luis Obispo of the Bishop-Saint. Then from its long point, across twelve miles of foaming sea, Arguello cast its light on to Conception. And beyond Conception was only here and there a shower, with the clouds resting low on the mountains and in the long channel the waves heaving.

SEVENTH DAY

WHILE AS YET he scarce walked upright steadily, man-fashioned for himself many gods—of earth and of sea, of the nether world, but (most of all) gods of the sky. Of these; sometimes he imagined gods of the farther air, high and serene, celestial in the empyrean. Sometimes they were of the middle air, rulers of the four winds, of thunder and lightning, of rain. Still again, they were demons of the lower air, malignant, haunting headland and cliff and rim-rock, pouncing in squall or sand-storm. But most often, each god had many aspects, being now the far master of the sky, now the rain-bringer, and again the spiteful demon crushing the corn-field with hail.

Of all lands and peoples is the roll-call of the storm-gods. Zeus the cloud-gatherer, lord of lightning. Adad-Ramman, the duplex, sender to the Babylonian plain alike of nourishing rain and devastating tempest. Jupiter of the rain; Thor, the thunderer; Indra, freer of the waters. Pulugu of the Bengal sea, before whose wrath the pigmy Andamanese cower low. Kilima, Mahu, Dzakuta. Pase-Kamui of the Ainus; Asiak who rules the air, above the far-off northern ice. Tlaloc of Mexico, thundering from his mountain-top.

Man walks the earth, but is of the air. Elsewhere he pays homage, not to the air itself of which he is unconscious, but to the powers which move within the air. He bows his head before wind and rain.

And what of Jehovah? Jehovah who poured the Deluge forty days and forty nights, and then sent the rainbow, his sign and pledge! Jehovah who came as a thick cloud upon the mountain and spoke to his servant Moses through thunders and lightnings!

n that part of the western United States which the storm
now dominated, a highly civilized race of men had hung so
many wires upon so many poles that hardly a landscape was
devoid of them. These wires served many purposes. The
larger ones supported bridges, and served for trolleys and
conveyors. A very great number carried electric current for
power, light, telegraph, and telephone. Others served as
guys, fences, aërials, and clothes-lines.

A common quality of almost all these wires was that they
were erected in the open air wholly exposed to the atmos-
pheric forces. Yet such was the ingenuity of these men, and
the tenacity of steel and copper that even a great Pacific
storm could discommode only a few of the wires.

In the heaviest winds the wires swayed easily back and
forth. Rain served only to increase their weight a little, and
then dripped off harmlessly. Snow was scarcely more effec-
tive. In the higher mountains the snow clung to the wires
and frequently built up to a diameter of several inches. The
wires sagged somewhat beneath this load, but sooner or
later the very weight of the snow overcame its cohesive
power. At that moment a small amount of snow dropped
off; this sudden change caused the wire to vibrate sharply
and to dislodge most of the remaining snow. Thus relieved
the wire swung back and forth for a few seconds, and then
settled down to receive its next load.

In one zone, however, the attack of the storm upon the
wires was more serious. Between the snow of the higher
mountains and the rain of the foothills lay necessarily a
region of transition in which the precipitation was neither
rain nor snow but something about half way between and
much more clinging and tenacious than either. This half-
frozen rain and half-melted snow often built up a solid
sheathing, not to be shaken off of its own weight, and steadily
growing heavier as the storm lasted. A catastrophic snap-
ping of wires was prevented only by the saving circumstance
that the zone was seldom more than a few miles broad and
frequently shifted location as colder or warmer air blew in
from the Pacific. With each shift of position the wires of any
particular region had a respite and might manage to relieve
themselves of their loads.

So, although no storm passed without damage, the actual
damage could usually be attributed to some pyramiding of
accidents which managed to overcome the margin of safety
which man's ingenuity had established.

During the early hours of Monday morning such a critical

dition existed at a point where the transmission line
ench Bar Power-House ran along the side of a foothi
ge at an elevation of about three thousand feet. The lin
s of a kind which may be seen almost anywhere in th
ited States. The sturdy spruce poles were sixty feet high;
ch bore two well-braced cross-arms, and eight wires. The
ree topmost wires were the heaviest and served as the
arree-phase high-voltage transmission line. These wires were
arried upon large insulators, one at the very top of the pole,
and the others at the ends of the upper cross-arm. Upon one
side of the lower cross-arm, smaller insulators supported the
three service wires, operating at a lower voltage and supply-
ing current to the near-by district; the other side of this
cross-arm carried the two wires of the company's telephone.

The conditions of the storm were such that a strong south
wind, funneling through a gap, was blowing up-hill and across
the wires. Several miles farther south snow was falling from
the clouds. As it fell, the snow half melted; then, as it was
about to reach the ground, the strongly blowing wind swept
it along and carried a large part of it actually up-hill. Since
rising air grows cooler, the half-melted snow was quickly
chilled below freezing, and in that condition was blown across
the wires. Every particle which ledged upon them froze into
solid ice at the moment of coming to rest. The lower wires
were somewhat protected by the pine trees growing along
the edge of the right-of-way, but the upper wires took the
full attack of the storm.

Under these conditions the sheathing of ice built up
rapidly. By the time it was a half foot in diameter each span
of the three upper wires was supporting a ton of ice. The
wires, however, were constructed about a steel core, and each
was normally capable of supporting several times the weight
which had as yet accumulated.

Some days previous, however, an owl had happened to
alight on one of the cross-arms. The ensuing electrocution
had caused a shower of electric sparks, and had burned and
weakened one of the wires.

3

In the orange groves of Brownsville the norther lashed the
branches, and the temperature at dawn was two degrees
above freezing. Men made ready their fires for the bitter, still
cold which follows the ceasing of the wind; and women prayed
to God and to his Son. Across the Rio Grande in the orange
groves of Montemorelos wind and temperature were the
same; the brown-faced men shrugged their shoulders in resi-
nation, and women prayed to the dark Virgin of Guadalupe.

Across the broad reach of the Gulf the storm drove on. It tossed the ships in its path—tankers of the oil ports, cotton- and banana- and coffee-boats. Over the warm waters the air grew less chill; and its lower levels, sucking up the spray from every white-cap, grew thick with moisture.

Beyond the Gulf, in the wind's path, lay the long crescent of the Mexican coast. "*El Norte!*" said the brown-faced people, and drew their serapes closer. In early morning the storm struck Vera Cruz; waves lashed the quays; spray wreathed the ancient castle of San Juan. Upon the mountain slopes by Jalapa the storm broke in torrents of rain; it tore the great leaves of the banana trees; it whipped the coffee-bushes and the gardenias. In their wattled tropical huts the people huddled shivering. Higher up, there was snow on the peaks—Orizaba, the Perote, and Malinche.

Through the passes—fiercer than Aztec or Spaniard—the storm poured down upon the Valley of Mexico. The wind stirred the lakes to foam; the cypresses of Chapultepec tossed wet branches; the flowers of Xochimilco were wet and sodden. Clouds covered Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl; snow was white upon Ajusco.

But farther that way the storm could not go, for the great mountains blocked its passage. And by the swimming-pools of Cuernavaca the fair-skinned tourists lay in the hot sun, and wondered why that morning the little cloud-banners streamed off from the peaks to the north.

Blocking the norther's path, to the southwest lay the wall of the Mexican Cordillera; to the southeast, the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala. But between were only the low hills of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and into that gap the wind poured as into a funnel. It spent the last of its rain upon the northern slope; dry and cool it started down toward the Pacific. Descending, it warmed; it ceased to be a chilling blast from the Arctic and became almost mild. But because of the funnel, the wind was stronger. On the Pacific it met the steamers from Panama, and buried them bows-under. "Tehuantepecer!" explained the stewards. "Have to expect them this time of year." The captains logged a ten-point gale,

Grown moist again from the tropical ocean, the wind skirted the coast of bananas and coffee. Striking the mountains the air exploded in thunderstorms. "*Chubasco!*" said the Salvadoreans. Like the men farther north, the soft Nicaraguans shivered in a cold wave, although the temperature did not fall below fifty-six. "*Papagayo!*" said the Costa Ricans.

At last, having penetrated to within ten degrees of the Equator, growing warm in the tropical sun, the far-seen

vasion from the north felt the drag of that great current of air which belts the earth's central zone, and turning westward mingled with the steadily blowing trade wind.

4

Theoretically, the J. M. knew that such things could happen. At the Institute he had even heard a visiting specialist in dynamic meteorology read a paper on the synoptic preliminaries of a polar outbreak and demonstrate mathematically the sources of energy involved. Nevertheless, when he saw the map that morning, the J. M. almost gasped. To know that all this was in the actual process of happening was very different from thinking of it as equations—and at the same time to realize that as part of the Weather Bureau he carried his share of responsibility for charting it and forecasting its progress. He felt as if the government of the air had suddenly been overwhelmed by revolution.

In the orderly hemisphere of the text-books there was a high-pressure area over the Pole and another near the Tropic of Cancer in what were known as the "horse latitudes." Between the two, in the temperate zone, a succession of storms moved steadily from west to east. South of the sub-tropical high pressure was low pressure again, and the trade winds blowing from northeast to southwest.

But now, in two great tongues of cold air, the polar high pressure had broken clear through the chain of storms. It had joined with the high pressure of the horse latitudes, and even broken into the region of the trade winds.

He kept telling himself that such an outbreak was fully in accord with meteorological theory. The regular circulation of air was (like most things on the earth) imperfect; it resulted in too much air being carried northward, so that cataclysmic polar outbreaks such as this were necessary to restore the balance. But still, to be actually in its presence was fearful.

With the pressure risen to 1050 the polar air mass centered over Fort Yukon. From it one tongue of cold air reached far south across the Pacific, and then in a long curve to the eastward joined the remnants of the old Pacific High off the Lower California coast. But the great discharge of cold air poured southward across the plains of North America and even over the Gulf of Mexico. There also it had joined the remnants of the sub-tropical high, and that air (set in motion by the northern incursion) was now blowing a gale along the Pacific coast of Central America.

Surrounded almost entirely within the two arms of this polar outbreak, Maria was brought to a standstill off the coast. The J.M. looked at her with a fatherly feeling. First

she had been an active little storm running her thousand miles a day, slipping through the air as a wave. She had matured, and with heightened winds had bodily carried the air along with her; she had broken a ship, and swept a man overboard. Then she had shrunk, and seemed to be declining. Now, caught between the two polar arms, she had become stationary, and again vast and vigorous, and in her nature more complicated than ever before.

In fact, she was so complicated that the J.M. had to admit he did not wholly understand her. She was no longer a baby; a baby ate and slept, and was a fairly simple affair. By now, Maria was more like a middle-aged person who has grown too individualized, not to say crotchety, to fit any rules. At first, she had been a storm right out of a text-book. She had had two fronts, and then only one front—just as you expected. But now, because of the complex mixing of her air and because of the mountains along the coast, she might have a dozen fronts and be developing new ones all the time. That would be the reason why the rain sometimes fell in torrents, and sometimes quit altogether for a half hour or so.

Yes, he had a fatherly feeling, but he was no longer in a position to say "Father knows best." The very fact that she had traveled across the Pacific and arrived off the coast in such vigorous state showed that she was not following the rules. Usually the storms which reached California were secondary developments from the storms which had formed off Asia.

Like a father whose child has suddenly become a powerful and famous person, the J.M. began to feel his affection mingled with awe. From Sitka to San Diego was now Maria's domain. She was a gigantic creature of the atmosphere, drawing moisture from the great Pacific and expending it as rain and snow upon a thousand miles of coast.

The Chief, that morning, moved about with a smile on his face. His forecast could have been no better if he had made the weather himself. And there was plenty of rain still to come.

5

The weakened wire on the transmission line was becoming so heavily loaded with ice that it could no longer withstand the strain. At eighteen seconds after 9:02 A.M. it broke. In the next fraction of a second the following results took place.

The wire began to fall toward the ground. Thirty-six thousand horse-power ceased to flow into the general P-L system. The immediate region (an unimportant foothill district) suffered a complete failure of electric energy. In towns within

In the operation-room at French Bar Power-House a bell rang loudly, the automatic oil switches broke the circuit, the ammeters hit the bumper, and the dynamos changed tone sharply. At Ringgold Sub-station, a hundred miles to the south, voltmeters and ammeters reacted and a bell rang. The frequency of the whole P-L system fell from 60.02 to 59.88. In the L.D.'s office, still another hundred miles away, a vibrating red line upon a recording-drum indicated this fall. At Elk Power-House, which was controlling the system, the same change was indicated on a dial. In the reserve steam power-house at Holladay the large turbine valves opened. Every electric clock from Shasta to Tehachapi was threatened with losing time, and many delicate automatic processes were endangered.

During the next fraction of a second the wire continued to fall. The operator at French Bar Power-House reacted to the signals and began to reach for a switch. The operator at Ringgold Sub-station moved his hand toward the desk-telephone. The controlling operator at Elk Power-House turned clockwise the valve upon which his hand was resting. In the Holladay steam power-house the steam pressure released by the opening of the automatic valve set a dynamo in motion.

Since the ice-laden wire had been at its lowest point about twenty-five feet above the surface of the snow-covered ground, the time of its fall was somewhat more than one second. Almost as the wire struck the snow, the Holladay operator was closing his hand around the telephone, and the French Bar operator was just touching the switch control. Because the Elk operator had already opened his valve, more water was flowing against his turbines and the frequency of the whole system was rising toward sixty; the Elk operator was watching the record of this rise upon the dial. The same rise was indicated by the red line in the L.D.'s office. In the nearby towns lights were growing brighter after a lapse so brief that to human eyes it had been merely a flicker. The functioning of electric clocks and automatic processes was no longer threatened.

By the time the Ringgold operator had drawn the telephone toward him and removed the receiver, the P-L system had adjusted itself to the loss of the French Bar line and had supplied the 36,000 horse-power from other sources.

The Ringgold operator got the telephone receiver to his ear, and heard a man's voice in the middle of a vigorous conversation. The Ringgold operator spoke into the transmitter: "I need the line for operation," and the voice stopped talking between two syllables as if someone had suddenly closed fingers around the speaker's throat.

The L.D. was reading a letter when the telephone rang. "Ringgold operator speaking," said the voice. "The French

Bar sixty k-v line just went out."

"Don't say 'just,'" said the L.D. "When did it go?"

"Nine-two," said the operator, abashed.

The L.D. saw that the minute hand of his electric clock was a little past nine-three. "O.K.," he said, and called French Bar.

Meanwhile the broken wire had continued to sway and vibrate; it had set the other wires into motion; great chunks of ice were cracking off and falling. The operator at French Bar had reached the switch-control, and thrown in the switch, which had immediately tripped out again. At this indication that the break was permanent, he had telephoned Johnny Martley, the power-house superintendent, at his house a hundred yards away. Since Martley was in another room and had to be called to the phone, he got the news of the break later than the L.D. had. He had scarcely hung up when the bell rang again, and the L.D. was on the line.

"The switch went out again; so she looks bad," he informed the L.D.

"That's the same line that went out temporarily three days ago. Whatever it was, the storm made it worse."

"We patrolled every inch of that line the next day—couldn't find a thing."

"I'm not blaming you," snapped the L.D. "But get your men out now, while we sectionalize the line. Wait a minute though—how's the storm up there?"

"Plenty bad. She started at sundown, and she's been blowin' and rainin' and snowin' and sleetin' ever since—ain't even stopped long enough to spit on her hands. You can't see a hundred feet."

"O. K. Get your men ready."

The L.D. slapped down the receiver, and looked up to see his assistant standing in the doorway, telephone on chest.

"What power-house do you want to take over for French Bar?"

The L.D. was piqued that he had given a chance for the question to be asked, for at a time like this when water would be going to waste it was sheer extravagance to use an emergency steam-plant for a minute longer than was necessary. The L.D. considered a moment; in his brain he saw clearly a diagram of the company's fifty-one hydro-electric plants scattered over a territory as large as Great Britain. Some of them were already carrying a full load; others were more or less out for overhauling; others had reservoirs depleted by the drought. But there was still plenty of reserve.

Two Rivers Power-House, three hundred miles north, had plenty of water and had been operating at half-load that morning.

"Tell Two Rivers to take over," he said. With these words, the L.D. had made the last adjustment necessary until (as was likely enough) the storm developed some new emergency elsewhere. He estimated an hour at least before Martley would report, but the time might be more, depending upon snow conditions and other difficulties. The L.D. then began to devote himself to his regular routine—bizarre enough at best, since it involved electricity, a product which cannot be stored but must be manufactured, transported, and consumed, all in the same instant.

Two hundred miles away Johnny Martley got busy on the telephone, but since even maintenance-men are human beings, their mustering consumed minutes in place of the fractions of seconds which had been all that was needed for the automatic electrical devices. One man off duty except for emergency, was still in his slippers and had to climb into his boots and "tin pants." Another had just retired to privacy with the current issue of *Ranch Tales*. Nevertheless, within ten minutes they were fighting their way through the storm and assembling around the truck in the garage.

In the interval the French Bar operator under Martley's direction and in co-operation with Ringgold had ordered switches closed at various points along the line, and by a series of tests had established that the break must be within five miles of the power-house. Ringgold informed the L.D., and the L.D. called French Bar again.

"Is your gang started?" said the L.D.

"Ready to roll. I'm talkin' from the garage now."

"O.K. Roll! In a storm like this we've got to get French Bar going before something goes out somewhere else." The L.D. hung up, and noted the time was 9:21.

In the garage Martley turned to the four men of the gang. Three of them were making jokes at the last comer about his late arrival and (imagined) bleary-eyed appearance—jokes about marital activities which must have been current before Agamemnon. Muffled and gauntleted, the men were almost as well sealed against the weather as if they had been deep-sea divers. They were heavy and burly, for on transmission lines the work demanded more than a mere pole-monkey.

At Martley's word two of them mounted to the truck-seat, and the two others crawled in at the rear among the tools, coils of wire, grounds, insulators, jugs of drinking water, and skis.

"Why don't lines ever fall in nice weather?" said one of them, joking by ancient formula.

The engine roared. The windshield-wipers started. Martley rolled up the door, and a blast of snow-laden wind whirled blindingly into the garage. With chains slapping on the concrete floor, the truck moved out.

The truck had heavy going to get away from the powerhouse. Twice it stalled in drifts, and had to be backed up for another try. But on the highway the snow-plows had already cleared the way. For a mile the transmission line was close to the road; then the gang had to leave the truck and take to the snow. They parked by one of the U.S. 40 signs. They were close to the three-thousand-foot level, and the snow was much too wet for webs; it would be bad going even for skis. In the lee of the truck, still joking, they got their skis on and loaded themselves.

They worked along the hillside in single file. Although each of them used skis constantly all winter, they plodded heavily and awkwardly. A man weighted down with fifty or sixty pounds of miscellaneous, hastily packed material cannot dash down hills and execute perfect Christianas. Already snow coated them; it clung to their eye-brows; it built up weight upon the tools and coils of wire which they carried. Each man bent himself to meet the wind's force, and plugged steadily on. They followed the pole line, and each pole—as they won up even and then passed it—marked a definite progress. Once they stopped to breathe themselves. They shook off some of the weight of snow, and puffed luxuriously. In the sweep of the storm no one tried to light a cigarette.

"Let's go, boys," said the foreman. "The L.D. will be callin' in a few minutes, wantin' to know where the hell we are."

They went on. Each man could see for himself that the wires above them were weighted with accumulated snow and ice. They had no doubt what they would find the trouble to be. When they came to the fallen wire, they gratefully threw off the weight which they were carrying, and rested a minute.

Then one man went on a half mile to the nearest telephone to report, and the rest set about repairing the break. First they grounded the line on both sides, for there must be no chance that a fool someplace could throw the wrong switch, and kill a man while he worked. Then one man climbed the ice-coated pole; every time he stuck his spikes in, the ice scaled off in chunks.

It was heavy work, and dangerous too, in the storm. But the men, shut in by the flying snow, had no chance for either

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sympathy or applause. A wrench slipped, and blood spurted from where the skin was stripped from three knuckles; the man flexed his fingers to see whether they still would work, and picked up the wrench again. The man on the pole reached too far; something gave way, and only the lucky grip of two finger-tips saved him from a fifty-foot fall. He did not even stop to curse.

They restrung the wire, but for all their heaving it still hung a foot lower than the others.

"Let 'er rest, boys," said the foreman. "She don't look so pretty, but if she lasts out the winter, we'll fix 'er up next summer."

They took the grounds off, and telephoned in that the line was ready. They stood by while the operators at French Bar and Ringgold tested the line. Then they loaded up, and plugged back. The truck was plastered all over with snow, and they had to scrape snow and ice from the windshield before the wipers would work.

They stopped in at a highway lunch-counter for some coffee. The waitress bawled them out for coming in that way, looking like a bunch of gorillas and making the place look like a tough joint. She was a local girl, and they told her to go to hell. But they had to admit they looked pretty bad, and Larry's hand with the blood on it was messy. So they hurried with their coffee. The foreman called up the power-house. When he came back from the phone-booth, he was already buttoning his jacket. "Come on, you," he said. "There's a lady up to Gold Creek, and her electric iron won't work." So they went on there to see if any of the local lines needed fixing.

"O.K.," said the L.D., "French Bar is patched up. Cut Two Rivers out, and put French Bar back in again. Anything else?"

"Just a lot of little stuff on distribution lines. Nothing important."

The assistant faded into the outer office, and the L.D. sat back for a moment relaxing. That had been a nice little skirmish with the storm that morning, but now it was eleven-five, and everything fixed up and back to work. Tough spruce, copper, steel—they were hard even for a great storm to beat. And the men too. Finally it came back to the men. For a moment he thought of calling up, and telling Martley to thank the boys for the good job they did in the storm. He shaped the words. But he never made the call.

After all, he decided, that was only routine for the boys. Granted, they gave more than the company paid for. But

still, thanking them, you made them soft. Amateurs should be patted on the back, but it cheapened professionals. A man shouldn't be congratulated for his daily work, even though that work was hard and dangerous.

6

As yet only a trickle of water ran in the gullies. The river still showed its sand-bars; it had scarcely deepened half a foot by the gauges; its surface was dark, not brown, beneath the ruffling of the south wind and the rain-drops. In these first hours of the storm, the shrunken, long-dry earth drew to itself all the moisture.

He would have been a brave mathematician to calculate how many billions of dry clods had lain in the fields of California. The clods must first grow dark and heavy and soft; they must swell, and then losing their identity sink back into the earth itself. Only then could the water flow freely. Every crack in the parched soil was a canyon into which poured thousands of rain-drops.

By deep affinity, every grain of dust drew water to itself. The punky dryness of rotting logs grew slowly sodden. In the thickets of blackberry, and toyon, and poison oak, the dead leaves lay deep; beneath these rested the half rotted leaves and twigs of older years, and still deeper the mould of generations. This porous mass sucked moisture like a stiff sponge, and paradoxically the life-giving water even woke to new vigor the very processes of decay.

Still more, the living vegetation sucked in and held the rain. How many bucketfuls to change from black to green all the moss upon all the rocks? How many tank-cars to wet all the pine-needles and all the oak-leaves? How many trains of tank-cars to uncurl all the blades of grass upon all the hills? Leaves shrunken to conserve moisture expanded and grew heavy; drooping shoots stood up stiff and vigorous. The very cells expanded, and the protoplasm for its subtle chemistry absorbed to itself countless tons of water.

Even animal life drew in the water. Cattle and horses grew dark beneath the downpour. The fleeces of the sheep were heavy. Deer in the forest glades changed from dun to brown. Through the tunnels of ants and beetles the moisture seeped downward. The channels of earthworms were as millions of conduits. The myriad far-ranging burrows of gophers and ground-squirrels took the trickles deeper still. Then at last following the fissures of the earth itself the seeping moisture from the surface reached ground which was no longer dry, and began to join that great fluctuating reservoir of the waters which are beneath the earth.

until all this should be fully achieved, the river was low, well expect water to stand in a sieve as streams to run before the land itself was satisfied.

the Valley the rain slacked off sometimes; now and then a scrap of blue sky showed through. But the long, canyon-angled slope of the foothills forced the moist winds upward, set up to four thousand was the shifting zone of rain and snow. But where the long crest of the Sierra thrust its peaks upward like a great wave upon the continent, the wind-blown snow flew so steadily and thickly that a man might remember that ancient tale of a northern land where the air was full of feathers.

At noon the Superintendent looked out from the Maintenance Station at the top of the Pass. He had never read the story, but the thought came to him that the air looked much as if someone had emptied a pillowcase in front of an electric fan. He could still see the snow-crusts tamarack tree which was his gauge, and so he knew that the storm was as yet only of average power for the Sierra crest, although in most places it would have been a blizzard of unparalleled intensity. So far he had held the road with the push-plows. But now which it pushed aside tumbled back from the high bank already built up. "Time for the rotaries," he said to himself. Peters took out the first rotary; big Swede Swenson was his swamper. The Superintendent crawled in beside Swenson to ride for a few minutes; he remembered that the two had been fighting a few days before, and he wanted to step on any trouble. Peters steered the great machine, and angled it into the snow-bank until the right-hand cutter-bar bit deeply. Then they stood still for a minute while Swenson worked the controls to set the level of the augers. "A little lower," ordered Peters. "O.K., Chief," said Swenson the swamper. The Superintendent smiled comfortably; now with word to be done they were good-natured as fat puppies. With a sudden whir which rose at once to an all-enveloping roar, the big machine was off. It vibrated and shook at frantically. Driver and swamper leaned anxiously forward. Crowded into one corner the Superintendent could only snow-encrusted glass and the inside of the cab. For a moment in spite of long experience he felt panic; the pondous plow seemed with all its shaking and bouncing to be tearing down the highway at death-dealing speed although

cards Andrei and Pavel carried reverently, rose to seize the power, they were both in the streets. Andrei Taganov, his hair in the wind, fought at the siege of the Winter Palace. Pavel Syerov received credit for stopping—after most of the treasures were gone—the looting of a Grand Duke's mansion.

In the year 1918, Andrei Taganov, in the uniform of the Red Army, marched with rows of other uniforms, from shops and factories, through the streets of Petrograd, to the tune of the Internationale, to the depot, to the front of civil war. He marched solemnly, with silent triumph, as a man walks to his wedding.

Andrei's hand carried a bayonet as it had fashioned steel; it pulled a trigger as it had pushed a lever. His body was young, supple, as a vine ripe in the sun, on the voluptuous couch of a trench's mud. He smiled slowly and shot fast.

In the year 1920, Melitopol hung by a thread between the White Army and the Red. The thread broke on a dark spring night. It had been expected to break. The two armies held their last stand in a narrow, silent valley. On the side of the White Army was a desperate desire to hold Melitopol, a division numbering five to one of their adversaries, and a vague, grumbling resentment of the soldiers against their officers, a sullen, secret sympathy for the red flag in the trenches a few hundred feet away. On the side of the Red Army was an iron discipline and a desperate task.

They stood still, a few hundred feet apart, two trenches of bayonets shimmering faintly, like water, under a dark sky, of men ready and silent, tense, waiting. Black rocks rose to the sky in the north and black rocks rose to the sky in the south; but between them was a narrow valley, with a few blades of grass still left among the torn clots of earth, and enough space to shoot, to scream, to die—and to decide the fate of those beyond the rocks on both sides. The bayonets in the trenches did not move. And the blades of grass did not move, for there was no wind and no breath from the trenches to stir them.

Andrei Taganov stood at attention, very straight, and asked the Commander's permission for the plan he had explained. The Commander said: "It's your death, ten to one, Comrade Taganov."

Andrei said: "It does not matter, Comrade Commander."
 "Are you sure you can do it?"
 "It has been done, Comrade Commander. They're ripe. They need but one kick."

"The Proletariat thanks you, Comrade Taganov."

Then those in the other trenches saw him climb over the top. He raised his arms, against the dark sky; his body looked tall and slender. Then he walked, arms raised, toward the White trenches; his steps were steady and he did not hurry. The blades of grass creaked, breaking under his feet, and the sound filled the valley. The Whites watched him and waited in silence.

He stopped but a few steps from their trenches. He could not see the many guns aimed at his breast; but he knew they were there. Swiftly, he took the holster at his belt and threw it to the ground. "Brothers!" he cried. "I have no weapons. I'm not here to shoot. I just want to say a few words to you. If you don't want to hear them—shoot me."

An officer raised a gun; another stopped his hand. He didn't like the looks of their soldiers; they were holding bayonets; but they were not aiming at the stranger; it was safer to let him speak.

"Brothers! Why are you fighting us? Are you killing us because we want you to live? Because we want you to have bread and give you land to grow it? Because we want to open a door from your pigsty into a state where you'll be men, as you were born to be, but have forgotten it? Brothers, it's your lives that we're fighting for—against your guns! When our red flag, ours and yours, rises . . ."

There was a shot, a short, sharp sound like a pipe breaking in the valley, and a little blue flame from an officer's gun held close under blue lips. Andrei Taganov whirled and his arms circled against the sky, and he fell on the clotted earth.

Then there were more shots and fire hissing down the White trenches, but it did not come from those on the other side. An officer's body was hurled out of the trench, and a soldier waved his arms to the Red soldiers, yelling: "Comrades!" There were loud hurrahs, and feet stamping across the valley, and red banners waving, and hands lifting Andrei's body, his face white on the black earth, his chest hot and sticky.

Then Pavel Syerov of the Red Army jumped into the White trenches where Red and White soldiers were shaking hands, and he shouted, standing on a pile of sacks:

"Comrades! Let me greet in you the awakening of consciousness! Another step in the march of history toward Communism! Down with the damn bourgeois exploiters! Loot the looters, comrades! Who does not toil, shall not

Proletarians of the world, unite! As Comrade Karl Marx has said, if we, the class of . . . "

Andrei Taganov recovered from his wound in a few months. It left a scar on his chest. The scar on his temple he acquired later, in another battle. He did not like to talk about that other battle; and no one knew what had happened after it.

It was the battle of Perekop in 1920 that surrendered the Crimea for the third and last time into Soviet hands. When Andrei opened his eyes he saw a white fog flat upon his chest, pressing him down like a heavy weight. Behind the fog, there was something red and glowing, cutting its way toward him. He opened his mouth and saw a white fog escaping from his lips, melting into the one above. Then he thought that it was cold and that it was the cold which held him chained to the ground, with pain like pine needles through his every muscle. He sat up; then he knew that it was not only the cold in his muscles, but a dark hole and blood on his thigh; and blood on his right temple. He knew, also, that the white fog was not close to his chest; there was enough room under it for him to stand up; it was far away in the sky and the red dawn was cutting a thin thread through it, far away.

He stood up. The sound of his feet on the ground seemed too loud in a bottomless silence. He brushed the hair out of his eyes and thought that the white fog above was the frozen breath of the men around him. But he knew that the men were not breathing any longer. Blood looked purple and brown and he could not tell where bodies ended and earth began, nor whether the white blotches were clots of fog or faces.

He saw a body under his feet and a canteen on its hip. The canteen was intact; the body was not. He bent and a red drop fell on the canteen from his temple. He drank.

A voice said: "Give me a drink, brother."

What was left of a man was crawling toward him across a rut in the ground. It had no coat, but a shirt that had been white; and boots that followed the shirt, although there did not seem to be anything to make them follow.

Andrei knew it was one of the Whites. He held the man's head and forced the canteen between lips that were the color of the blood on the ground. The man's chest gurgled and heaved convulsively. No one else moved around them.

Andrei did not know who had won last night's battle; he did not know whether they had won the Crimea; nor whether

—more important to many of them—they had captured Captain Karsavin, one of the last names to fear in the White Army, a man who had taken many Red lives, a man whose head was worth a big price in Red money. Andrei would walk. Somewhere this silence must end. He would find men, somewhere; Red or White—he did not know, but he started walking toward the sunrise.

He had stepped into a soft earth, damp with cold dew, but clear and empty, a road leading somewhere, when he heard a sound behind him, a rustling as of heavy skis dragged through the mud. The White man was following him. He was leaning on a piece of stick and his feet walked without leaving the ground. Andrei stopped and waited for him. The man's lips parted and it was a smile. He said: "May I follow you, brother? I'm not very . . . steady to find my own direction."

Andrei said: "You and I aren't going the same way, buddy. When we find men—it will be the end for either you or me."

"We'll take a chance," said the man.

"We'll take a chance," said Andrei.

So they walked together toward the sunrise. High banks guarded the road, and shadows of dry bushes hung motionless over their heads, with thin branches like a skeleton's fingers spread wide apart, webbed by the fog. Roots wound across the road and their four feet crossed them slowly, with a silent effort. Ahead of them, the sky was burning the fog. There was a rosy shadow over Andrei's forehead; on his left temple little beads of sweat were transparent as glass; on his right temple the beads were red. The other man breathed as if he were rattling dice deep inside his chest.

"As long as one can walk—" said Andrei.

"—one walks," finished the man.

Their eyes met as if to hold each other up.

Little red drops followed their steps in the soft, damp earth—on the right side of the road and on the left.

Then, the man fell. Andrei stopped. The man said: "Go on."

Andrei threw the man's arm over his shoulder and went on, staggering a little under the load.

The man said: "You're a fool."

"One doesn't leave a good soldier, no matter what color he's wearing," said Andrei.

The man said: "If it's my comrades that we come upon—I'll see that they go easy on you."

"I'll see that you get off with a prison hospital and a good bed—if it's mine," said Andrei.

Then, Andrei walked carefully, because he could not allow himself to fall with his burden. And he listened attentively to the heart beating feebly against his back.

The fog was gone and the sky blazed like a huge furnace where gold was not melted into liquid, but into burning air. Against the gold, they saw the piled black boxes of a village far away. A long pole among the boxes pointed straight at a sky green and fresh, as if washed clean with someone's huge mop in the night. There was a flag on the pole and it beat in the morning wind like a little black wing against the sunrise. And Andrei's eyes and the tearless eyes on his shoulder looked fixedly at the little flag, with the same question. But they were still too far away.

When they saw the color of the flag, Andrei stopped and put the man down cautiously and stretched his arms to rest and in greeting. The flag was red.

The man said strangely: "Leave me here."

"Don't be afraid," said Andrei, "we're not so hard on fellow soldiers."

"No," said the man, "not on fellow soldiers."

Then Andrei saw a torn coat sleeve hanging at the man's belt and on the sleeve the epaulet of a captain.

"If you have pity," said the man, "leave me here."

But Andrei had brushed the man's sticky hair off his forehead and was looking attentively, for the first time, at a young, indomitable face he had seen in photographs.

"No," said Andrei, very slowly, "I can't do that, Captain Karsavin."

"I'm sure to die here," said the Captain.

"One doesn't take chances," said Andrei, "with enemies like you."

"No," said the Captain, "one doesn't."

He propped himself up on one hand, and his forehead, thrown back, was very white. He was looking at the dawn.

He said: "When I was young, I always wanted to see a sunrise. But mother never let me go out so early. She was afraid I'd catch a cold."

"I'll let you rest for a while," said Andrei.

"If you have pity," said Captain Karsavin, "you'll shoot me."

"No," said Andrei, "I can't."

Then they were silent.

"Are you a man?" asked Captain Karsavin.

"What do you want?" asked Andrei.

The Captain said: "Your gun."

Andrei looked straight into the dark, calm eyes and extended his hand. The Captain shook it. When he took his hand out of the Captain's, Andrei left his gun in it.

Then he straightened his shoulders and walked toward the village. When he heard the shot, he did not turn. He walked steadily, his head high, his eyes on the red flag beating against the sunrise. Little red drops followed the steps in the soft, damp earth—on one side of the road only.

IX

"Argounov's Navy Soap" was a failure.

The unshaven bookkeeper scratched his neck, muttered something about unprincipled bourgeois competition and disappeared with the price of the three pieces he had sold.

Alexander Dimitrievitch was left with a tray full of soap and a black despair.

Galina Petrovna's energy found their next business venture.

Their new patron had a black astrakhan hat and a high astrakhan collar. He panted after climbing four flights of stairs, produced from the mysterious depths of his vast, fur-lined coat a heavy roll of crinkling bills, counted them off, spitting on his fingers, and was always in a hurry.

"Two kinds," he explained, "the crystals in glass tubes and the tablets in paper boxes. I furnish the materials. You—pack. Remember, eighty-seven tablets in all you have to put into a box labeled 'One Hundred.' Great future in saccharine."

The gentleman in the astrakhan hat had a large staff; a net of families packing his merchandise; a row of peddlers carrying his trays on street corners; a net of struggling saleswomen procuring saccharine from far-away Berlin.

Four heads bent around the wick in the Argonov's living room and eight hands counted carefully, mechanically, despairingly: six little crystals from a single container fit into each little glass tube, eighty-seven in any one tube.

each tiny white box. The boxes came in long sheets; they had to be cut out and folded; they bore German inscriptions in green letters—"Genuine German Saecharine"; the other side of the sheet bore the bright colors of old Russian advertisements.

"Sorry, it's too bad about your studies, Kira," Galina Petrovna said, "but you'll just have to help. You have to eat, you know."

That evening, there were only three heads and six hands around the wick: Alexander Dimitrievitch had been mobilized. There had been snow storms; snow lay deep and heavy on Petrograd's sidewalks; a mobilization of all private traders and unemployed bourgeois had been effected for the purpose of shoveling snow. They had to report for duty at dawn; they grunted and bent in the frost, steam rising to blue noses, old woolen mittens clutching shovels, red flesh in the slits of the mittens; they worked, bending and grunting, shovels biting wearily into white walls. They were given shovels, but no pay.

Maria Petrovna came to visit. She unrolled yards of scarfs from around her neck, shaking snow off her felt boots in the anteroom, coughing.

"No, no, Marussia," Galina Petrovna protested. "Thanks, but you can't help. The powder'll make you cough. Sit by the stove. Get yourself warm."

". . . seventy-four, seventy-five, seventy-six . . . What news, Aunt Marussia?" Lydia asked.

"Heavy are our sins," Maria Petrovna sighed. "Is that stuff poisonous?"

"No, it's harmless. Just sweet. The dessert of the revolution."

"Vasili sold the mosaic table from the drawing room. . . . Fifty million rubles and four pounds of lard. I made an omelet with the egg powder we got at the co-operative. They can't tell me they made that powder out of fresh eggs."

". . . sixteen, seventeen, eighteen . . . they say their NEP is a failure, Marussia . . . nineteen, twenty . . . they're going to return houses to owners before long."

Maria Petrovna took a little nail buffer out of her bag and went on talking, polishing her nails mechanically; her hands had always been her pride; she was not going to neglect them, even though she did think, at times, that they had changed a little.

"Did you hear about Boris Koulikov? He was in a hurry

and he tried to jump into a crowded tramway at full speed. Both legs cut off."

"Marussia! What's the matter with your eyes?"

"I don't know. I've been crying so much lately . . . and for no reason at all."

"There's no spiritual comfort these days, Aunt Marussia! Lydia sighed, ". . . fifty-eight, fifty-nine. . . . Those pagans! Those sacrilegious apostates! They've taken the gold ikon from the churches—to feed their famine somewhere. They've opened the sacred relics . . . sixty-three, sixty-four, sixty-five. . . . We'll all be punished, for they defy God."

"Irina lost her ration card," sighed Maria Petrovna. "She gets nothing for the rest of this month."

"I'm not surprised," said Lydia coldly. "Irina is not to be trusted."

Lydia disliked her cousin ever since Irina, following her custom of expressing her character judgments in sketches, had drawn Lydia in the shape of a mackerel.

"What's that on your handkerchief, Marussia?" Galina Petrovna asked.

"Oh . . . nothing . . . sorry . . . it's a dirty one. . . . I can't sleep at night any more, it seems. Seems my nightgown is always so hot and sticky. I'm so worried about Victor. Now he's bringing the strangest fellows into the house. They don't remove their caps in the drawing room and they shake ashes all over the carpet. I think they're . . . Communists. Vasil hasn't said a word. And it frightens me. I know what he thinks. . . . Communists in the house!"

"You're not the only ones," said Lydia and threw a dark glance at Kira. Kira was stuffing crystals into a glass tube.

"You try and speak to Victor and he says: 'Diplomacy is the highest of the Arts.' . . . Heavy are our sins!"

"You'd better do something about that cough, Marussia." "Oh, it's nothing. Nothing at all. Just the cold weather. Doctors are fools and don't know what they're talking about."

Kira counted the little crystals in the palm of her hand. She tried not to breathe or swallow; when she did, the white powder seeping through her lips and nostrils, bit her throat the pain of a piercing, metallic sweetness.

Maria Petrovna was coughing: "Yes, Nina Mirskaia. . . . Mine! Not even a Soviet registration wedding. And her husband, God rest his soul, was a bishop. . . . Just sleeping like cats."

Lydia cleared her throat and blushed.

Galina Petrovna said: "It's a disgrace. This new love freedom will ruin the country. But, thank God, nothing like this will ever happen to us. There still are some families with some standards left."

The bell rang.

"It's father," said Lydia and hurried to open the door. It was Andrei Taganov.

"May I see Kira?" he asked, shaking snow off his shoulders.

"Oh! . . . Well, I can't stop you," Lydia answered haughtily.

Kira rose, when he entered the dining room, her eyes wide in the darkness.

"Ah! . . . Well, what a surprise!" said Galina Petrovna, her hand holding a half-filled box, trembling, the saccharine tablets rolling out. "That is . . . yes . . . a most pleasant. . . . How are you tonight? . . . Ah! . . . Yes. . . . May I present? Andrei Fedorovitch Taganov—my sister, Maria Petrovna Dunaeva."

Andrei bowed; Maria Petrovna looked, astonished, at the box in her sister's hand.

"May I speak to you, Kira?" Andrei asked. "Alone?"

"Excuse us," said Kira. "This way, Andrei."

"I daresay," gasped Maria Petrovna, "to your room? Why, modern youth behaves almost like . . . like Communists."

Galina Petrovna dropped the box; Lydia kicked her aunt's ankle. Andrei followed Kira to her room.

"We have no light," said Kira, "just that street lamp outside. Sit down here, on Lydia's bed."

Andrei sat down. She sat on her mattress on the floor, facing him. The street light from beyond the window made a white square on the floor, with Andrei's shadow in the square. A little red tongue flickered in space, high in the corner of Lydia's ikons.

"It's about this morning," said Andrei. "About Syerov."

"Yes?"

"I wanted to tell you that you don't have to worry. He had no authority to question you. No one can issue an order to question you—but me. The order won't be issued."

"Thank you, Andrei."

"I know what you think of us. You're honest. But you're not interested in politics. You're not an active enemy. I trust you."

"I don't know his address, Andrei."

"I'm not asking whom you know. Just don't let them drag you into anything."

"Andrei, do you know who that man is?"

"Do you mind if we don't discuss it, Kira?"

"No. But will you allow me one question?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Why are you doing this for me?"

"Because I trust you and I think we're friends. Though don't ask me why we are, because I don't know that myself."

"I know that. It's because . . . you see, if we had souls, which we haven't, and if our souls met—yours and mine—they'd fight to the death. But after they had torn each other to pieces, to the very bottom, they'd see that they had the same root. I don't know if you can understand it, because, you see, I don't believe in souls."

"I don't either. But I understand. And what is the root?"

"Do you believe in God, Andrei?"

"No."

"Neither do I. But that's a favorite question of mine. An upside-down question, you know."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if I asked people whether they believed in life, they'd never understand what I meant. It's a bad question. It can mean so much that it really means nothing. So I ask them if they believe in God. And if they say they do—then, I know they don't believe in life."

"Why?"

"Because, you see, God—whatever anyone chooses to call God—is one's highest conception of the highest possible. And whoever places his highest conception above his own possibility thinks very little of himself and his life. It's a rare gift, you know, to feel reverence for your own life and to want the best, the greatest, the highest possible, here, now, for your very own. To imagine a heaven and then not to dream of it, but to demand it."

"You're a strange girl."

"You see, you and I, we believe in life. But you want to fight for it, to kill for it, even to die—for life. I only want to live it."

Behind the closed door, Lydia, tired of counting machine, rested by playing the piano. She played Chopin.

Andrei said suddenly: "You know, that's beautiful."

"What's beautiful, Andrei?"

"That music."

"I thought you didn't care for music."

"I never have. But, somehow, I like this, now, here."

They sat in the darkness and listened. Somewhere below, a truck turned a corner. The window panes trembled with a thin, tense shudder. The light square with Andrei's shadow rose from the floor, swept, like a fan, across the walls, and froze at their feet again.

When the music ended, they returned to the dining room. Lydia still sat at the piano. Andrei said hesitantly: "It was beautiful, Lydia Alexandrovna. Would you play it again?"

Lydia jerked her head proudly. "I'm sorry," she said, rising brusquely. "I'm tired." And she left the room with the step of a Jeanne d'Arc.

Maria Petrovna cringed in her chair, as if trying to squeeze herself out of Andrei's sight. When her cough attracted his eyes, she muttered: "I've always said that our modern youth does not follow sufficiently the example of the Communists."

When Kira accompanied him to the door, Andrei said: "I don't think I should call on you, Kira. It makes your family uncomfortable. It's all right, I understand. Will I see you at the Institute?"

"Yes," said Kira. "Thank you, Andrei. Good night."

*

Leo stood on the steps of the empty mansion. He did not move when he heard Kira's feet hurrying across the snow; he stood motionless, his hands in his pockets.

When she was beside him, their eyes met in a glance that was more than a kiss. Then, his arms crushed her with the violence of hatred, as if he wanted to grind their coats into shreds against each other.

Then he said: "Kira. . . ."

There was some odd, disturbing quality in the sound of his voice. She tore his cap off; she raised herself on tiptoe to reach his lips again, her fingers in his hair.

He said: "Kira, I'm going away."

She looked at him, very quietly, her head bent a little to one shoulder, in her eyes—a question, but no understanding.

"I'm going away tonight. Forever. To Germany."

She said: "Leo. . . ." Her eyes were wide, but not frightened.

He spoke as if biting into every word, as if all his hatred and despair came from these sounds, not their meaning: "I'm a fugitive, Kira. A counter-revolutionary. I have to leave Russia

fore they find me. I've just received the money—from my aunt in Berlin. That's what I've been waiting for. They smuggled it to me."

She asked: "The boat leaves tonight?"

"A smugglers' boat. They smuggle human flesh out of this half-trap. And desperate souls, like mine. If we're not caught—we land in Germany. If we're caught—well, I don't suppose it's a death sentence for everybody, but I've never heard of a man who was spared."

"Leo, you don't want to leave me."

He looked at her with a hatred more eloquent than tenderness. "Sometimes I've found myself wishing they would catch the boat and bring me back."

"I'm going with you, Leo."

He was not startled. He asked: "Do you understand the chance you're taking?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that it's your life at stake if we don't reach Germany, and perhaps also if we do?"

"Yes."

"The boat leaves in an hour. It's far. We have to start right away. From here. No time to get any luggage."

"I'm ready."

"You can't tell anyone. You can't telephone any farewells."

"I don't have to."

"All right. Come on."

He picked up his cap and walked to the street, swiftly, silently, without looking at her or noticing her presence. He called a sleigh. The only words he spoke were an address to the driver. The sharp runners cut into the snow, and the sharp wind into their faces.

They turned a corner, past a house that had collapsed; snow-dusted bricks had rolled far out into the street; the ray of a lamp post behind the house pierced the empty rooms; the skeleton of an iron bed hung high somewhere in the ray of light. A newsboy barked hoarsely: "*Pravda! . . . Krasnaya Gazeta!*" to an empty street.

Leo whispered: "Over there . . . there are automobiles . . . and boulevards . . . and lights. . . ."

An old man stood in a doorway, snow gathering in the brim of his frayed hat, his head hanging down on his breast, asleep over a tray of home-made cookies.

Kira whispered: ". . . lipstick and silk stockings. . . ."

A stray dog sniffed at a barrel of refuse under the dark window of a co-operative.

Leo whispered: "... champagne ... radios ... jazz bands."

Kira whispered: "... like the 'Song of Broken Glass' ..."

A man moaned, blowing on his hands: "Saccharine, citizens!"

A soldier cracked sunflower seeds and sang about the little apple.

Posters followed them, as if streaming slowly from house to house, red, orange, white, arms, hammers, wheels, levers, lice, airplanes.

The noise of the city was dying behind them. A factory raised tall black chimneys to the sky. Over the street, on a rope from roof to roof, like a barrier, a huge banner clicked, fighting the wind, twisting in furious contortions, yelling to the street and the wind:

PROLETAR . . . OUR COLLECTI . . . CLASS WELD . . . STRUG
 . . . FREED . . . FUTURE . . .

Then their eyes met, and the glance was like a handshake. Leo smiled; he said: "I couldn't ask you to do this. But I think I knew you'd come."

They stopped at a fence on an unpaved street. Leo paid the driver. They started to walk slowly. Leo watching cautiously till the sleigh disappeared around a corner. Then he said: "We have two miles to walk to the sea. Are you cold?"

"No."

He took her hand. They followed the fence down a wooden sidewalk. A dog howled somewhere. A bare tree whistled in the wind.

They left the sidewalk. Snow rose to their ankles. They were in an open field, walking toward a bottomless darkness.

She moved with quiet precision, as one moves in the face of the inevitable. He held her hand. Behind them, the red glow of the city breathed into the sky. Ahead of them, the sky bent to the earth, or the earth rose to the sky, and their bodies were cutting the two apart.

Snow rose to their calves. The wind blew against them. They walked bent forward, their coats like sails fighting a storm, cold tightening the skin of their cheeks.

Beyond the snow was the world; beyond the snow was that consummate entity to which the country behind them bowed

reverently, wistfully, tragically: Abroad. Life began beyond the snow.

When they stopped, the snow ended abruptly. They looked into a black void without horizon or sky. From somewhere far below, they heard a swishing, slapping sound, as if someone were emptying pails of water at regular intervals. Leo whispered: "Keep quiet."

He was leading her down a narrow, slippery path, in someone's footprints. She distinguished a vague shape floating on the void, a mast, a tiny spark, like a dying match.

There were no lights on the ship. She did not notice the husky figure in their path until the ray of a flashlight struck Leo's face, licked his shoulder, stopped on hers, and was gone. She saw a black beard and a hand holding a gun. But the gun was lowered.

Leo's hand crinkled in his pocket and slipped something to the man. "Another fare," Leo whispered. "This girl goes with me."

"We have no cabins left."

"That's all right. Mine's enough."

They stepped onto boards that rocked softly. Another figure rustled up from nowhere and led them to a door. Leo helped Kira down the companionway. There was a light below deck and furtive shadows; a man with a trim beard and the Cross of St. George on his breast looked at them silently; in a doorway, a woman wrapped in a coat of tarnished brocade watched them fearfully, clutching a little wooden box in her hands, the hands trembling.

Their guide opened a door and pointed inside with a jerk of his head.

Their cabin was only a bed and a narrow strip of space between cracked, unpainted walls. A board cut a corner off as a table. A smoked lantern hung over the table, and a yellow, shivering spot of light. The floor rose and fell softly, as if breathing. A shutter was locked over the porthole.

Leo closed the door and said: "Take your coat off."

She obeyed. He took his coat off and threw his cap down on the table. He wore a heavy black sweater, tight around his arms and shoulders. It was the first time that they had seen each other without overcoats. She felt undressed. She moved away a little.

The cabin was so small that even the air enveloping her seemed a part of him. She backed slowly to the table in the corner.

He looked down at her heavy felt boots, too heavy for her slim figure. She followed his glance. She took her boots off and threw them across the cabin.

He sat down on the bed. She sat at the table, hiding her legs with their tight black cotton stockings under the bench, her arms pressed closely to her sides, her shoulders hunched, her body gathered tightly, as if cringing from the cold, the white triangle of her open collar luminous in the semi-darkness.

Leo said: "My aunt in Berlin hates me. But she loved my father. My father . . . is dead."

"Shake the snow off your shoes, Leo. It's melting on the floor."

"If it weren't for you, I'd have taken a boat three days ago. But I could not go away without seeing you. So I waited for this one. The other boat disappeared. Shipwrecked or caught—no one knows. They didn't reach Germany. So you've saved my life—perhaps."

When they heard a low rumble and the boards creaked louder and the flame in the lantern fluttered against the smoked glass, Leo sprang up, blew out the light and opened the shutter over the porthole. Their faces close together in the little circle, they watched the red glow of the city moving away. The red glow died; then there were only a few lights left between earth and sky; and the lights did not move, but shrank slowly into stars, then into sparks, then into nothing. She looked at Leo; his eyes were wide with an emotion she had never seen in them before. He asked slowly, triumphantly:

"Do you know what we're leaving?"

Then his hands closed over her shoulders and his lips forced hers apart, and she felt as if she were leaning back against the air, her muscles feeling the weight of his. Her arms moved slowly over his sweater, as if she wanted to feel his body with the skin of her arms.

Then he released her, closed the shutter and lighted the lantern. The match spluttered with a blue flame. He lighted a cigarette and stood by the door, without looking at her, smoking.

She sat down by the table, obediently, without a word or a question, her eyes not leaving him.

Then he crushed the cigarette against the wall and approached her, and stood silently, his hands in his pockets, his mouth a scornful arc, his face expressionless.

She rose slowly, obediently, looking up at him. She stood still as if his eyes were holding her on a leash.

He said: "Take your clothes off."

She said nothing, and did not move her glance away from his, and obeyed.

He stood watching her. She did not think of the code of her parents' world. But that code came back once, for an instant, when she saw her skirt on the floor; then, in defiance, she regretted that her underwear was not silk, but only heavy cotton.

She unfastened the strap of her slip and let it fall under her breast. She was about to unfasten the other strap, but he tore her off the ground, and then she was arched limply in space, her hair hanging over his arm, her breast at his mouth.

Then they were on the bed, her whole weight on his hand spread wide between her naked shoulder blades. Then he blew out the lantern. She heard his sweater falling to the floor.

Then she felt his legs like a warm liquid against hers. Her hair fell over the edge of the bed. Her lips parted as in a snarl.

X

When Kira awakened, Leo's head was resting on her one breast; a sailor was looking at the other.

She jerked the blanket up to her chin and Leo awakened. They stared up together.

It was morning. The door was open. The sailor stood on the threshold; his shoulders were too wide for the door and his fist was closed over a gun at his belt; his leather jacket was open over a striped sweater and his mouth was open in a wide grin over two resplendent white stripes of teeth; he stooped a little, for his blue cap touched the top of the doorway; the cap bore a red five-pointed Soviet star.

He chuckled: "Sorry to disturb you, citizens."

Kira, her eyes glued to the red star, the star that filled her eyes, but could not reach her brain, muttered foolishly, softly, as a child: "Please go away. This is our first . . ." Her voice choked, as the red star reached her brain.

The sailor chuckled: "Well, you couldn't have selected a worse time, citizen. You couldn't have."

Leo said: "Get out of here and let us dress."

His voice was not arrogant, nor pleading; it was such an implacable command that the sailor obeyed as if at the order of a superior officer. He closed the door behind him.

Leo said: "Lie still till I gather your things. It's cold."

He got out of bed and bent for her clothes, naked as a statue and as unconcerned. A gray light came through a crack of the closed shutter.

They dressed silently. The ceiling trembled under hurrying steps above. Somewhere a woman's voice was howling in sobs, like a demented animal. When they were dressed, Leo said: "It's all right, Kira. Don't be afraid."

He was so calm that for an instant she welcomed the disaster that let her see it. Their eyes met for a second; it was a silent sanction of what they both remembered.

He flung the door open. The sailor was waiting outside. Leo said evenly: "Any confessions you want. I'll sign anything you write—if you let her go." Kira opened her mouth; Leo's hand closed it brutally. He continued: "She had nothing to do with it. I've kidnapped her. I'll stand trial for it, if you wish."

Kira screamed: "He's lying!"

Leo said: "Shut up."

The sailor said: "Shut up, both of you."

They followed him. The woman's howls were deafening. They saw her crawling on her knees after two sailors who held her little wooden box; the box was open; the jewels sparkled through the sailors' fingers; the woman's hair hung over her eyes and she howled into space.

At an open cabin door, Leo suddenly jerked Kira forward so that she passed without seeing it. Inside the cabin, men were bending over a motionless body on the floor; the body's hand was clutching the handle of a dagger in the heart, under the Cross of St. George.

On deck, the gray sky descended to the tip of the mast and steam breathed with commands from the lips of men who had taken control of the boat, men from the coast guard ship that rose and fell as a huge shadow in the fog, a red flag stirring feebly on its mast.

Two sailors held the arms of the black-bearded smugglers' captain. The captain was staring at his shoes.

The sailors looked up at the giant in the leather jacket, waiting for orders. The giant took a list out of his pocket and held it under the captain's beard; he pointed with his thumb, behind his shoulder, at Leo, and asked: "Which one is him?"

The captain's nose pointed to a name. Kira saw the giant's eyes widen in a strange expression she could not understand.

"Who's the girl?" he asked.

"Don't know," the captain answered. "She's not on our passenger list. She came at the last minute—with him."

"Seventeen of them counter-revolutionary rats that tried to sneak out of the country, Comrade Timoshenko," said a sailor.

Comrade Timoshenko chuckled, and his fist struck the muscles under his striped sweater. "Thought you could get away, eh?—from Stepan Timoshenko of the Red Baltfleet?"

The captain stared at his shoes.

"Keep your eyes and your guns ready," said Comrade Timoshenko. "Any funny business—shoot their guts out."

He grinned up at the fog, his teeth gleaming, his tanned neck open to the cold, and walked away, whistling.

When the two ships began to move, Comrade Timoshenko came back. He passed by Leo and Kira in the crowd of prisoners on the wet, glistening deck, and stopped, looking at them for a second, an inexplicable expression in his dark, round eyes. He passed and came back and said aloud to no one in particular, his thumb pointing at Kira: "The girl's all right. He kidnapped her."

"But I'm telling you . . ." Kira began.

"Make your little whore keep quiet," Timoshenko said slowly; and there was something like understanding in the glance he exchanged with Leo.

They saw the skyline of Petrograd rise like a long, low string of houses stretched in a single row at the edge of an immense, frozen sky. The dome of St. Isaac's Cathedral, a pale gold ball sliced in half, looked like a weary moon setting in the smoke of chimneys.

Leo and Kira sat on a coil of ropes. Behind them, a pock-marked sailor smoked a cigarette, his hand on his gun.

They did not hear the sailor move away. Stepan Timoshenko approached them. He looked at Kira and whispered:

"When we land—there'll be a truck waiting. The boys will be busy. I just have a hunch they'll have their backs turned. When they do—you start going—and keep going."

"No," said Kira, "I'll stay with him."

"Kira! You . . ."

"Don't be a damn little fool. You can't help him."

"You won't get any confessions from him—for my sake."

Timoshenko chuckled: "He has no confessions to make. And I don't want children mixed in with something they don't

understand a damn about. See that she's gone when we reach the truck, citizen."

Kira looked into the dark, round eyes; they leaned close to her and words hissed, in a whisper, through the white teeth: "It's easier to get one—than two—out of the G.P.U. I'll be there around four this afternoon. Come and ask for Stepan Timoshenko. Maybe I'll have news for you. No one'll hurt you. Gorokhovaia 2."

He did not wait for an answer. He walked away and slapped the pock-marked sailor in the jaw for leaving the prisoners alone.

Leo whispered: "Do you want to make it harder for me? You'll go. Also—you'll stay away from Gorokhovaia 2."

When houses rose close over the mast, he kissed her. It was hard to tear her lips off his, as hard as off frozen glass.

"Kira, what's your name?" he whispered.

"Kira Argounova. And yours?"

"Leo Kovalensky."

*

"At Irina's. We talked and didn't notice the time and it was too late to come home."

Galina Petrovna sighed indifferently, her nightgown trembling on her shoulders in the cold anteroom. "And why this homecoming at seven in the morning? I suppose you awakened your Aunt Marussia and poor Marussia with her cough. . . ."

"I couldn't sleep. Aunt Marussia didn't hear me."

Galina Petrovna yawned and shuffled back to her bedroom. Kira had stayed overnight at her cousin's several times; Galina Petrovna had not been worried.

Kira sat down and her hands fell limply. There were so many hours to wait till four in the afternoon. She should be terrified, she thought, and she was; but under the terror there was something without name or words, a hymn without sound, something that laughed, even though Leo was locked in a cell on Gorokhovaia 2. Her body still felt as if it were holding him close to her.

*

House number 2 on Gorokhovaia Street was a pale green, the color of pea soup. Its paint and plaster were peeling. Its windows had no curtains and no iron bars. The windows looked quietly upon a quiet side street. It was the Petrograd Headquarters of the G.P.U.

There were words that people did not like to mention; they felt a superstitious fear in uttering their sounds, as when they spoke of a desolate cemetery, a haunted house, the Spanish Inquisition, Gorokhovaia 2. Many nights had passed over Petrograd; in the nights there had been many steps, many ringing door bells, many people gone never to be seen again; the flow of a silent terror swelled over the city, hushing voices to whispers; the flow had a heart, from which it came, to which it returned; that heart was Gorokhovaia 2.

It was a building like any of its neighbors; across the street, behind similar windows, families were cooking millet and playing the gramophone; at its corner, a woman was selling cakes; the woman had pink cheeks and blue eyes; the cakes had a golden crust and smelt of warm grease; a poster on a lamp post advertised the new cigarette of the Tobacco Trust. But as Kira walked toward that building, she saw people passing by its green walls without looking up, with tensely casual expressions, their steps hurrying involuntarily, as if afraid of their presence, of their eyes, of their thoughts. Behind the green walls was that which no one wanted to know.

The door was open. Kira walked in, her hands in her pockets, slouching deliberately, indifferently. There was a wide stairway inside, and corridors, and offices. There were many people, hurrying and waiting, as in all Soviet government buildings; there were many feet shuffling down bare floors, but not many voices. On the faces—there were no tears. Many doors were closed; the faces were set and closed like the doors.

Kira found Stepan Timoshenko sitting on a desk in an office and he grinned at her.

"It's just as I thought," he said. "They have nothing on him. It's just his father. Well, that's past. Had they got him two months ago—it would've been the firing squad and not many questions asked. But now—well, we'll see."

"What has he done?"

"Him? Nothing. It's his father. Heard of the conspiracy of Professor Gorsky, two months ago? The old fool wasn't in it—how could he, being blind?—but he hid Gorsky in his house. Well, he paid for it."

"Who was Leo's father?"

"Old Admiral Kovalensky."

"The one who . . ." Kira gasped and stopped.

"Yeah. The one who was blinded in the war—and was shot."

"Oh!"

"Well, I wouldn't have done it—not that time. But I'm not

the only one to have the say. Well, you don't make a revolution with white gloves on."

"But if Leo had nothing to do with it, why . . ."

"At that time—they'd have shot anyone that knew anyone in the conspiracy. Now—they've cooled off. It's past. He's lucky that way. . . . Don't stare like a little fool. If you'd worked here, you'd know what difference time, and days, and hours can make here. Well, that's the way we work. Well, what damn fool thinks that a revolution is all perfumed with cologne?"

"Then—you can let him . . ."

"I don't know. I'll try. We'll investigate. Then there's the business of trying to leave the country illegally. But that—I think I can. . . . We don't fight children. Especially fool children who find time for love right on a spewing volcano."

Kira looked into the round eyes; they had no expression; but the big mouth was grinning; he had a short nose that turned up, and wide, insolent nostrils.

"You're very kind," she said.

"Who's kind?" he laughed. "Stepan Timoshenko of the Red Baltfleet? Do you remember the October days of 1917? Ever heard of what went on in the Baltic fleet? Don't shudder like a cat. Stepan Timoshenko was a Bolshevik before a lot of these new punks had time to dry the milk behind their ears."

"Can I see him?"

"No. Not a chance. No visitors allowed to that bunch."

"But then . . ."

"But then you go home and stay there. And don't worry. That's all I wanted to tell you."

"I have a friend who has connections, I think, who could . . ."

"You keep your mouth shut and don't drag no connections into this. Sit still for two or three days."

"That long!"

"Well, that's not as long as never seeing him again. And don't worry, we'll keep him locked up for you—with no women around."

He got off the desk, and grinned. Then his lips fell into a straight line; he towered over Kira, looking straight into her eyes, and his eyes were not gay. He said: "When you get him back, keep your claws on him. If you haven't any—grow some. He's not an easy stud. And don't try to leave the country. You're in this Soviet Russia; you may hate it, and you

may choke, but in Soviet Russia you'll stay. I think you have the claws for him. Watch him. His father loved him."

Kira extended her hand. It disappeared in Stepan Timoshenko's tanned fist.

At the door she turned and asked softly: "Why are you doing this?"

He was not looking at her; he was looking out the window. He answered: "I've gone through the war in the Baltic Fleet. Admiral Kovalensky was blinded in service in the Baltic Fleet. He was not the worst commander we had. . . . Get out of here!"

*

Lydia said: "She twists on her mattress all night long. You'd think we had mice in the house. I can't sleep."

Galina Petrovna said: "I believe you're a student, Kira Alexandrovna? Or am I mistaken? You haven't been at the Institute for three days. Victor said so. Would you condescend to inform us what kind of new foolishness is this that's come over you?"

Alexander Dimitrievitch said nothing. He awakened with a start, for he had dozed off, a half-filled saccharine tube in his hand.

Kira said nothing.

Galina Petrovna said: "Look at those circles under her eyes. No respectable girl looks like that."

"I knew it!" Lydia yelled. "I knew it! She's put eight saccharine crystals into that tube again!"

*

On the evening of the fourth day, the door bell rang.

Kira did not raise her eyes from the saccharine tube. Lydia, curious about every ringing bell, went to open the door.

Kira heard a voice asking: "Is Kira at home?"

Then the saccharine tube clattered to the floor, breaking into splinters, and Kira was at the anteroom doorway, her hand at her throat.

He smiled, the corners of his lips drooping arrogantly. "Good evening, Kira," he said calmly.

"Good evening, Leo."

Lydia stared at them.

Kira stood at the door, her eyes holding his, her lips paralyzed. Galina Petrovna and Alexander Dimitrievitch stopped counting the saccharine.

Leo said: "Get your coat, Kira, and come on."

She said: "Yes, Leo," and took her coat off the hanger on the wall, moving like a somnambulist.

Lydia coughed discreetly. Leo looked at her. His glance brought a warm, wistful smile to Lydia's lips; it always did that to women; yet there was nothing in his eyes except that when he glanced at a woman his eyes told her that he was a man and she was a woman and he remembered it.

Lydia gathered courage to disregard the lack of an introduction; but she did not know how to start and she gazed helplessly at the handsomest male ever to appear in their anteroom, and she threw bluntly the question that was on her mind: "Where do you come from?"

"From jail," Leo answered with a courteous smile.

Kira had buttoned her coat. Her eyes were fixed on him, as if she did not know that others were present. He took her arm with the gesture of an owner, and they were gone.

"Well, of all the unmannered . . ." Galina Petrovna gasped, jumping up. But the door was closed.

*

To the sleigh driver outside, Leo gave an address.

"Where is that?" he repeated her question, his lips in her fur collar, as the sleigh jerked forward. "That's my home. . . . Yes, I got it back. They had it sealed since my father's arrest."

"When did you . . ."

"This afternoon. Went to the Institute to get your address; then—home and made a fire in the fireplace. It was like a grave, hadn't been heated for two months. It will be warm for us by now."

The door they entered bore the red seal of the G.P.U. The seal had been broken; two red scabs of wax remained, parting to let them enter.

They walked through a dark drawing room. The fireplace blazed, throwing a red glow on their feet and over their reflection in the mirror of a parquet floor. The apartment had been searched. There were papers strewn over the parquet, and overturned chairs. There were crystal vases on malachite stands; one vase was broken; the splinters sparkled on the floor in the darkness, little red flames dancing and winking through them, as if live coals had rolled out of the fireplace.

In Leo's bedroom, a light was burning, a single lamp with a silver shade, over a black onyx fireplace. A last blue flame

quivered on dying coals and made a purple glow on the silver bedspread.

Leo threw his coat in a corner. He unbuttoned her coat and took it off; without a word, he unbuttoned her dress; she stood still and let him undress her.

He whispered into the little warm hollow under her chin: "It was torture. Waiting. Three days—and three nights."

He threw her across the bed. The purple glow quivered over her body. He did not undress. He did not turn out the light.

*

Kira looked at the ceiling; it was a silvery white far away. Light was coming in through the gray satin curtains. She sat up in bed, her breasts stiff in the cold. She said: "I think it's already tomorrow."

Leo was asleep, his head thrown back, one arm hanging over the edge of the bed. Her stockings were on the floor, her dress—on a bed post. Leo's eyelashes moved slowly; he looked up and said: "Good morning, Kira."

She stretched her arms and crossed them behind her head, and threw her head back, shaking the hair off her face, and said: "I don't think my family will like it. I think they'll throw me out."

"You're staying here."

"I'll go to say good-bye."

"Why go back at all?"

"I suppose I must tell them something."

"Well, go. But don't take long. I want you here."

*

They stood like three pillars, towering and silent, at the dining-room table. They had the red, puffed eyes of a sleepless night. Kira stood facing them, leaning against the door, indifferent and patient.

"Well?" said Galina Petrovna.

"Well what?" said Kira.

"You won't tell us again that you were at Irina's."

"No."

Galina Petrovna straightened her shoulders and her faded flannel bathrobe. "I don't know how far your foolish innocence can go. But do you realize that people might think that . . ."

"Certainly, I've slept with him."

The cry came from Lydia.

Galina Petrovna opened her mouth and closed it.

Alexander Dimitrievitch opened his mouth and it remained open.

Galina Petrovna's arm pointed at the door. "You'll leave my house," she said. "And you'll never come back."

"All right," said Kira.

"How could you? A daughter of mine! How can you stand there and stare at us? Have you no conception of the shame, the disgrace, the depraved . . ."

"We won't discuss that," said Kira.

"Did you stop to think it was a mortal sin? . . . Eighteen years old and a man from jail . . . And the Church . . . for centuries . . . for your fathers and grandfathers . . . all our Saints have told us that no sin is lower! You hear about those things, but God, my own daughter! . . . The Saints who, for our sins . . ."

"May I take my things," Kira asked, "or do you want to keep them?"

"I don't want one single thing of yours left here! I don't want your breath in this room! I don't want your name mentioned in this house!"

Lydia was sobbing hysterically, her head in her arms on the table. "Tell her to go, Mother!" she cried through sobs like hiccoughs. "I can't stand it! Such women should not be allowed to live!"

"Get your things and hurry!" Galina Petrovna hissed. "We have but one daughter left! You little tramp! You filthy little street . . ."

Lydia was staring, with incredulous awe, at Kira's legs.

*

Leo opened the door and took the bundle she had wrapped in an old bed sheet.

"There are three rooms," he said. "You can rearrange things any way you want. Is it cold outside? Your cheeks are frozen."

"It's a little cold."

"I have some hot tea for you—in the drawing room."

He had set a table by the fireplace. Little red tongues flickered in the old silver. A crystal chandelier hung against the gray sky of a huge window. Across the street, a line stood at the door of a co-operative, heads bent; it was snowing.

Kira held her hands against the hot silver teapot and

rubbed them across her cheeks. She said: "I'll have to gather that glass. And sweep the floor. And . . ."

She stopped. She stood in the middle of the huge room. She spread her arms out, and threw her head back, and laughed. She laughed defiantly, rapturously, triumphantly. She cried: "Leo! . . ."

He held her. She looked up into his face and felt as if she were a priestess, her soul lost in the corners of a god's arrogant mouth; as if she were a priestess and a sacrificial offering, both and beyond both, shameless in her laughter, choking, something rising within her, too hard to bear.

Then his eyes looked at her, wide and dark, and he answered a thought they had not spoken: "Kira, think what we have against us."

She bent her head a little to one shoulder, her eyes round, her lips soft, her face serene and confident as a child's; she looked at the window where, in the slanting mist of snow, men stood in line, motionless, hopeless, broken. She shook her head.

"We'll fight it, Leo. Together. We'll fight all of it. The country. The century. The millions. We can stand it. We can do it."

He said without hope: "We'll try."

XI

The Revolution had come to a country that had lived three years of war. Three years and the Revolution had broken railroad tracks, and scorched fields, and blown smokestacks into showers of bricks, and sent men to stand in line with their old baskets, waiting at the little trickle of life still dripping from provision centers. Forests stood in a silence of snow, but in the cities wood was a luxury; kerosene was the only fuel to burn; there was only one device to burn kerosene. The gifts of the Revolution were to come. But one—and the first—had been granted; that which in countless cities countless stomachs had learned to beg for the fire of their sustenance to keep the fire of their souls, the first badge of a new life, the first rule of a free country: the PRIMUS.

Kira knelt by the table and pumped the handle of the little brass burner that bore the words: "Genuine Primus. Made in Sweden." She watched the thin jet of kerosene filling a cup; then she struck a match and set fire to the kerosene in the cup, and pumped, and pumped, her eyes very attentive, the fire licking the black tubes with a tongue of soot, sending the odor of kerosene into her nostrils, until something hissed in the tubes and a wreath of blue flames sprang up, tense and hissing like a blow-torch. She set a pot of millet over the blue flames.

Then, kneeling by the fireplace, she gathered tiny logs, damp and slippery in her fingers, with an acrid odor of swamp and mildew; she opened the little door of the "Bourgeoise" and stacked the logs inside, and stuffed crumpled newspapers over them, and struck a match, blowing hard, bending low to the floor, her hair hanging over her eyes, whirls of smoke blowing back at her, rising high to the white ceiling, the crystals of the chandelier sparkling through gray fumes, gray ashes fluttering into her nostrils, catching on her eyelashes.

The "Bourgeoise" was a square iron box with long pipes that rose to the ceiling and turned at a straight angle into a hole cut over the fireplace. They had had to install a "Bourgeoise" in the drawing room, because they could not afford wood for the fireplace. The logs hissed in the box and, through the cracks in the corners, red flames danced and little whiffs of smoke fluttered once in a while, and the iron walls blazed a dull, overheated red, smelling of burned paint. The new little stoves were called "Bourgeoise," for they had been born in the homes of those who could not afford full-sized logs to heat the full-sized stoves in their once luxurious homes.

Admiral Kovalensky's apartment had seven rooms, but four of them had had to be rented long ago. Admiral Kovalensky had had a partition built across a hall, which cut them off from the tenants. Now Leo owned three rooms, the bathroom and the front door; the tenants owned four rooms, the back door and the kitchen. Kira cooked on the Primus and washed dishes in the bathroom. At times, she heard steps and voices behind the partition, and a cat meowing; three families lived there, but she never had to meet them.

When Leo got up in the morning, he found a table set in the dining room, with a snow-white cloth and hot tea steaming, and Kira flitting about the table, her cheeks glowing, her eyes laughing, light and unconcerned, as if these things had happened all by themselves. From their first day together

in her new home, she had stated her ultimatum: "When I cook—you're not to see me. When you see me—you're not to know that I've been cooking."

She had always known that she was alive; she had never given much thought to the necessity of keeping alive. She found suddenly that that mere fact of keeping alive had grown into a complicated problem which required many hours of effort, the simple keeping alive which she had always haughtily, contemptuously taken for granted. She found that she could fight it only by keeping, fiercer than ever, that very contempt; the contempt which, once dropped, would bring all of life down to the little blue flame of the Primus slowly cooking millet for dinner. She found she could sacrifice all the hours the struggle required, if only it would never rise between Leo and her, if only life itself, the life that was Leo, were kept intact and untouched. Those wasted hours did not count: she would keep silent about them. She kept silent, a hidden spark in her eyes twinkling with the exhilaration of battle. It was a battle, the first blows of a vague, immense battle she could not name, but felt, the battle of the two of them, alone, against something huge and nameless, something rising, like a tide, around the walls of their house, something in those countless, weary steps on the pavements outside, in those lines at the doors of co-operatives, the something that invaded their home with the Primus and the "Bourgeoise," that held millet and damp logs and the hunger of millions of strange, distorted stomachs against two lives fighting for their right to their future.

After breakfast Leo buttoned his overcoat and asked: "Going to the Institute today?"

"Yes."

"Need change?"

"A little."

"Back for dinner?"

"Yes."

"I'll be back at six."

He went to the University, she went to the Institute. She ran, sliding along the frozen sidewalks, laughing at strangers, blowing at a red finger in the hole of her glove, jumping on tramways at full speed, disarming with a smile the huffy conductoresses who growled: "You oughta be fined, citizen. You'll get your legs cut off some day."

She fidgeted at the lectures, and glanced at her neighbor's wristwatch, when she could find a neighbor with a wristwatch.

they laughed together; their eyes, and their lips, and their bodies met hungrily. She did not know how many times they awakened in the night; nor where she felt his lips, nor whether his lips hurt her. She heard nothing in the silence but the sound of his breath. She crushed her body against his; then she laughed lazily and hid her face in the curve of her arm, and listened to his breath on her neck, on the lashes of her closed eyes. Then she lay still, her teeth in a muscle of his arm, drunk on the smell of his skin.

★

Leo had no relatives in Petrograd.

His mother had died before the revolution. He was an only son. His father had stood over vast wheat fields under a blue sky dropping into dark forests far away, and thought that some day these fields and the forests would be laid at the feet of a dark-haired, dark-eyed boy, and in his heart there was a glow brighter than the sun in the ripe wheat.

Admiral Kovalensky seldom appeared at Court functions; the deck of a ship felt steadier under his feet than the parquet of the royal palace. But when he appeared, the eyes of stunned, eager, envious faces followed the woman who moved slowly on his arm. His wife, born a countess of an ancient name, had the beauty of centuries gathered, line by line, in her perfect body. When she died, Admiral Kovalensky noticed the first gray on his temples; but deep in his heart, in words he dared not utter, he thanked God that death had chosen to take his wife rather than his son.

Admiral Kovalensky had but one voice with which he issued commands to his sailors and spoke to his son. Some said he was too kind with his sailors, and some said he was too stern with his son. But he worshipped the boy whose name foreign tutors had changed to "Leo" from the Russian "Lev"; and he was helpless before the slightest flicker of a wish in the boy's dark, haughty eyes.

The tutors, and the servants, and the guests looked at Leo as they looked at the statue of Apollo in the Admiral's study, with the same reverent hopelessness they felt for the white marble of a distant age. Leo smiled; it was the only order he had to give, the only excuse for any of his orders.

When his young friends related, in whispers, the latest French stories, Leo quoted Spinoza and Nietzsche; he quoted Oscar Wilde at the prim gatherings of his stern aunt's Ladies' Charity Club; he described the superiority of Western cul-

"Well, I like you. But then, I expected to like you. And I hope you like me, because I'm the only one of your in-laws that you'll see—for a long time. But they'll all question me about you, you can be sure."

They sat in the shadows of the large drawing room and talked about Rembrandt, whom Irina was studying; and about the new perfume Vava Milovskaia had received from a smuggler—real French perfume. Coty's and fifty million rubles a bottle—and Irina had stolen a drop of it on her handkerchief—and Maria Petrovna had cried, smelling it; and about the American movie Irina had seen, in which women wore spangled gowns without sleeves—and there had been a shot of New York at night—real skyscrapers, floors and floors of lighted windows on the black sky—and she had stayed through two shows to see that shot, but it had been so brief—just a flash—she would like to draw New York.

She had picked up a book from the table and was sketching busily on the back of its white paper cover, her pencil flashing. When she finished, she threw the book to Kira across the room. Kira looked at the drawing: it was a sketch of Leo—standing erect, full figure, naked.

"Irina!"

"You may show it to him."

Leo smiled, his lips drooping, looking at Irina inquisitively.

"That's the state that fits you best," she explained. "And don't tell me that my imagination has flattered you—because it hasn't. Clothes hide nothing from a—well, yes, an artist. Any objections?"

"Yes," said Leo, "this book belongs to the Gossizdat."

"Oh, well," she tore the cover off swiftly, "tell them you've used the cover for a revolutionary poster."

Alone with Kira for a moment, before leaving, Irina looked at her earnestly, curiously, almost timidly, and whispered: "Are you . . . happy?"

Kira said indifferently: "I'm happy."

*

Kira seldom spoke of what she thought; and more seldom—of what she felt. There was a man, however, for whom she made an exception, both exceptions. She made other exceptions for him as well, and wondered dimly why she made them. Communists awakened fear in her, a fear of her own degradation if she associated, talked or even looked at them; a fear not of their guns, their jails, their secret, watchful eyes

—but of something behind their furrowed foreheads, something they had—or, perhaps, it was something they didn't have, which made her feel as if she were alone in the presence of a beast, its jaws gaping, whom she could never force to understand. But she smiled confidently up at Andrei Taganov; and pressed tightly against the wall of an empty auditorium at the Institute, her eyes radiant, her smile timid and trusting, like a child appealing to a guiding hand, she said: "I'm happy, Andrei."

He had not seen her for many weeks. He smiled warmly, quietly, looking down into her eager eyes. "I've missed you, Kira."

"I've missed you, Andrei. I . . . I've been busy."

"I didn't want to call on you. I thought you would prefer it if I never called at your house."

"You see . . ." Then she stopped. She could not tell him. She could not bring him to her new home—to Leo's home. Andrei could be dangerous; he was a member of the G.P.U.; he had a duty to fulfill; it was best not to tempt that duty. So she said only: "Yes, Andrei, I'd rather you would never call . . . at my house."

"I won't. But will you be more regular about your lectures? So that I can see you once in a while—and hear you say that you're happy? I like to hear that."

"Andrei, have you ever been happy?"

"I've never been unhappy."

"Is that enough?"

"Well, I always know what I want. And when you know what you want—you go toward it. Sometimes you go very fast, and sometimes only an inch a year. Perhaps you feel happier when you go fast. I don't know. I've forgotten the difference long ago, because it really doesn't matter, so long as you move."

"And if you want something toward which you can't move?"

"I never did."

"And if—on your way—you find a barrier that you don't want to break?"

"I never have."

She remembered suddenly: "Andrei, you haven't even asked me why I'm happy."

"Does it make any difference—so long as you are?"

He held her two hands, thin and trusting, in his fingers.

The first signs of spring in Petrograd were tears and smiles: the men smiled, the houses dropped the tears. High on the roofs, the snow was melting, gray with city dust like dirty cotton, brittle and shining like wet sugar, and twinkling drops dripped slowly, trickled in little gurgling brooks from the mouths of drain pipes, and across the sidewalks, and into the gutters, rocking gently cigarette stubs and sunflower-seed shells. Men walked out of the houses and breathed deeply, and smiled, and did not know why they smiled, until they looked up and saw that above the roofs the sky was a feeble, hesitant, incredulous blue, a very pale blue, as if a painter had washed the color off his brush in a huge tub of water, and the water held only a drop and a promise.

Icy mush crunched under galoshes and the sun made white sparks in the black rubber toes; sleigh-runners grunted, cutting brown ridges; a voice yelled: "Saccharine, citizens!"; drops tapped the sidewalks steadily, persistently, like a soft, distant machine gun; a voice yelled: "Violets, citizens!"

Pavel Syerov bought a pair of new boots. He blinked in the sun down at Comrade Sonia and bought her a hot, shiny cabbage cake from a woman on a corner. She chewed it, smiling. She said: "At three o'clock—giving lecture at the Komsomol on 'Our drive on the NEP front.' At five o'clock—giving talk at the Club of the Rabfae, on 'Proletarian Women and Illiteracy.' At seven—discussion at the Party Club on 'Spirit of the Collective.' Why don't you drop in at nine? Seems I never see you."

He said: "Sonia, old pal, can't take up your valuable time. People like you and me have no private life but that of our class duty."

Lines stood at the doors of shoe stores; the trade unions were giving out cards for the purchase of galoshes.

Maria Petrovna stayed in bed most of the day and watched the sun on the glass of a closed window, and hid her handkerchiefs from the sight of all.

Comrade Lenin had had a second stroke and had lost his power of speech. *Pravda* said: ". . . no higher sacrifice to the cause of the Proletariat than a leader burning out his will, health and body in the superhuman effort of the responsibility placed upon his shoulders by the Workers and Peasants."

Victor invited three Communist students to his room and they discussed the future of Proletarian Electrification. He let them out through the back door to avoid Vasili Ivanovitch.

England had treacherous designs on the Republic of Work-

ers and Peasants. Teaching of English was prohibited in schools.

Acia had to study German, sniveling over the difference of "der," "die," "das," trying to remember what it was that our German class brothers had done at Rapallo.

The boss at the Gossizdat said: "The city proletariat is marching tomorrow in a demonstration of protest against France's policy in the Ruhr. I expect all our employees to take part, Comrade Kovalensky."

Leo said: "I'll stay in bed. I'm having a headache—tomorrow."

Vasili Ivanovitch sold the shade off the lamp in the drawing room; he kept the lamp because it was the last one.

In the dark, warm evenings, churches overflowed with bowed heads, incense and candle light. Lydia prayed for Holy Russia and for the dull fear in her heart.

Andrei took Kira to the Marinsky Theater and they saw Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty" ballet. He left her at the house on Moika and she took a tramway to her other home. A light snow melted on her face, like rain.

Leo asked: "How's your Communist boy friend?"

She asked: "Have you been lonely?"

He brushed the hair off her forehead and looked at her lips, in the deliberate tension of refusing himself a kiss. He answered: "I would like to say no. But you know it's yes."

His warm lips gathered the cold spring rain off hers.

The year 1923, like any other, had a spring.

XII

Kira had waited in line for three hours to get the bread at the Institute Co-operative. It was dark when she stepped down from the tramway, her loaf pressed tightly under her arm. At distant corners, lanterns made snakes of light wiggle in black puddles. She walked straight ahead, her shoes splashing through the water, kicking little icicles that clinked like glass. When she turned the corner of her street, a hurrying s whistled to her in the darkness.

"Allo!" called Irina's voice. "And whom do I remind you of when I say that?"

"Irina! What are you doing here at this hour?"

"Just left your house. Waited for you for an hour. Had given up hope."

"Well, come on back."

"No," said Irina, "maybe it's better if I tell you here. I . . . well, I came to tell you something. And . . . well, maybe Leo won't like it, and he's home, and . . ." Irina hesitated, which was unusual for her.

"What is it?"

"Kira, how's . . . how're your finances?"

"Why, splendid. Why do you ask that?"

"It's just . . . you see . . . well, if I'm too presumptuous, tell me to shut up. . . . Don't be angry. . . . You know I've never mentioned them before . . . but it's your family."

Kira peered in the darkness at Irina's worried face. "What about them?"

"They're desperate, Kira. Just desperate. I know Aunt Galina'd kill me if she knew I told you, but. . . . You see, the saccharine man got arrested as a speculator. They sent him to jail for six years. And your folks . . . well, what is there left to do? You know. Last week father brought them a pound of millet. If we only could. . . . But you know how things are with us. Mother so sick. And nothing much left for the Alexandrovsky market but the wallpaper. I don't think they have a thing in the house—your folks. I thought maybe you . . . maybe you would like to know."

"Here," said Kira, "take this bread. We don't need it. We'll buy some from a private store. Tell them you've found, borrowed or stolen it, or anything. But don't tell them it's from me."

*

On the following day, Galina Petrovna rang the door bell. Kira was not at home. Leo opened the door and bowed graciously.

"I believe it is my . . . mother-in-law?" he asked.

"That's what it would like to be," Galina Petrovna stated.

His smile disarmed her; it was infectious; she smiled.

When Kira came in, there were tears. Galina Petrovna crushed her in her arms, before a word was said, and sobbed: "Kira, my child! My dear child! . . . God forgive us our sins! . . . These are hard days. . . . These are very hard

days. . . . After all, who are we to judge? . . . Everything's gone to pieces. . . . What difference does it all make? If we can just forget, and pull the pieces together, and . . . God show us the way. We've lost it. . . ."

When she released Kira, and powdered her nose from a little envelope full of potato flour, she muttered: "About that bread, Kira. We didn't use it all. I hid it. I was afraid—maybe you need it yourself. I'll bring it back if you do. We took only a small slice; your father was so hungry."

"Irina talks too much," said Kira. "We don't need the bread, Mother. Don't worry. Keep it."

"You must come and see us," said Galina Petrovna. "Both of you. Let by-gones be by-gones. Of course, I don't see why you two don't get . . . Oh, well, it's your business. Things aren't what they were ten years ago. . . . You must visit us, Leo—I may call you Leo, may I not? Lydia is so anxious to meet you."

*

One could buy bread in the private stores. But the price made Kira hesitate. "Let's go to a railroad station," she said to Leo.

Railroad terminals were the cheapest and most dangerous markets of the city. There were strict rules against private "speculators" who smuggled food from the villages. But the speculators in ragged overcoats dared long rides on roofs and buffers, miles on foot down slimy mud roads, lice and typhus on trains, and—on return—the vigilance of government agents. Food slinked into the city in dusty boots, in the linings of vermin-infested coats, in bundles of soiled underwear. The starved city awaited every train. After its arrival, in the dark side streets around the depot, crystal goblets and lace chemisettes were exchanged furtively for hunks of lard and mouldy sacks of flour.

Arm in arm, Kira and Leo walked to the Nikolaevsky station. Drops tapped the sidewalk. The sun dripped to the sidewalk with every drop. Leo bought a bunch of violets on a corner. He pinned it to Kira's shoulder, a purple tuft, young and fragrant on her old black coat. She smiled happily and kicked an icicle in a puddle, splashing water at the passerby, laughing.

The train had arrived. They made their way through the eager crowd that pushed them aside and drove to the platform and stuck elbows into their stomachs, and back to

Soldiers watched the descending passengers, silent, alert, suspicious.

A man stepped down from the train. He had a peculiar nose; it was so short and turned up so sharply that his two wide, slanting nostrils were almost vertical; under the nostrils there was a wide space and a heavy mouth. His stomach shivered like gelatin as he stepped down. His coat seemed too ragged, his boots too dirty.

Soldiers seized his arms. They were going to search him. He whined softly: "Comrades, brothers! So help me God, you're wrong. I'm nothing but a poor peasant, brothers, nothing but the poorest peasant. Never heard of speculating. But I'm a responsible citizen, too. I'll tell you something. If you let me go, I'll tell you something."

"What can you tell, you son of a bitch?"

"See that woman there? She's a speculator. I know. I'll tell you where she's hiding food. I seen her."

Strong hands seized the woman. Her arms were like a skeleton's in the soldiers' fists; gray hair hung over her eyes from under an old hat with a black feather; the shawl held on her sunken chest by an ancient mosaic pin shook silently, convulsively, a thin, nervous shudder, like that of a window at the distant sound of an explosion. She moaned, showing three yellow teeth in a dark mouth: "Comrades. . . . It's my grandson. . . . I wasn't going to sell. . . . It's for my grandson. . . . Please, let me go, comrades . . . my grandson—he's got the scurvy. . . . Has to eat. . . . Please, comrades. . . . The scurvy. . . . Please. . . ."

The soldiers dragged her away. Her hat was knocked off. They did not stop to pick it up. Someone stepped on the black feather.

The man with the vertical nostrils watched them go. His wide red lips grinned.

Then he turned and saw Kira looking at him. He winked mysteriously, in understanding, and pointed with a jerk of his head to the exit. He went out; Kira and Leo followed him, puzzled.

In a dark alley by the station, he looked around cautiously, winked again and opened his coat. The ragged coat had a smooth lining of heavy, expensive fur, with the suffocating odor of carnation oil used by all travelers of means as protection against lice on trains. He unfastened some unseen hooks in the depth of the fur. His arm disappeared in the lining and returned with a loaf of bread and a smoked ham.

He smiled. His lips and the lower part of his face smiled; the upper part—the short nose, the light, narrow eyes—remained strangely immobile, as if paralyzed.

"Here you are, citizens," he said boastfully. "Bread. ham, anything you wish. No trouble. We know our business."

The next moment, Kira was running down the street, fleeing wildly, senselessly from a feeling she could not explain.

"Just a little party, Kira darling," said Vava Milovskaia over the telephone. "Saturday night. . . . Shall we say about ten o'clock? . . . And you'll bring Leo Kovalensky, of course? I'm simply dying to meet him. . . . Oh, just fifteen or twenty people. . . . And Kira, here's something a little difficult: I'm inviting Lydia, and . . . could you bring a boy for her? You see, I have just so many boys and girls on my list, and they're all in couples, and—well, boys are so hard to get nowadays . . . and . . . well, you know how it is, and I thought maybe you knew someone—anyone. . . ."

"Anyone? Do you care if he's a Communist?"

"A Communist? How thrilling! Is he good-looking? . . . Certainly, bring him. . . . We're going to dance. . . . And we're going to have refreshments. Yes, food. Oh, yes. . . . And, oh, Kira, I'm asking every guest to bring one log of wood. One apiece. . . . To heat the drawing room. It's so large we couldn't affo . . . You don't mind? . . . So sweet of you. See you Saturday night."

Parties were rare in Petrograd in 1923. It was Kira's first. She decided to invite Andrei. She was a little tired of the deception, a little bewildered that it had gone so far. Leo knew all about Andrei; Andrei knew nothing about Leo. She had told Leo of her friendship; he had not objected; he smiled disdainfully when she spoke of Andrei, and inquired about her "Communist boy friend." Andrei knew no one in Kira's circle and no gossip had reached him. He never asked questions. He kept his promise and never called on her. They met at the Institute. They talked of mankind, and its future, and its leaders; they talked of ballet, tramways and atheism. By a silent agreement, they never spoke of Soviet Russia. It was as if an abyss separated them, but their hands and their spirits were strong enough to clasp over the abyss.

The grim lines of his tanned face were like the effigy of a medieval saint; from the age of the Crusades he had inherited the ruthlessness, the devotion, and also the austere chastity. She could not speak of love to him; she could not think

love in his presence; not because she feared a stern condemnation; but because she feared his sublime indifference.

She did not want to conceal it forever. The two men had to meet. She feared that meeting, a little. She remembered that one of them was the son of an executed father; the other one—a member of the G.P.U. Vava's party was a convenient occasion: the two would meet; she would watch their reactions; then, perhaps, she could bring Andrei to her house; and if, at the party, he heard the truth about her—well, she thought, so much the better.

Meeting him in the library of the Institute, she asked: "Andrei, would a bourgeois party frighten you?"

"Not if you'll be there to protect me—if that's an invitation."

"I'll be there. And it is an invitation. Saturday night. Lydia and I are going. And two men. You're one of them."

"Fine—if Lydia is not too afraid of me."

"The other one—is Leo Kovalensky."

"Oh."

"I *didn't* know his address *then*, Andrei."

"I *didn't* ask you, Kira. And it does not matter."

"Call for us at nine-thirty, at the house on Moika."

"I remember your address."

"My . . . oh, yes, of course."

*

Vava Milovskaia met her guests in the anteroom.

Her smile was radiant; her black eyes and black curls sparkled like the patent leather of the narrow belt around her slim waistline; and the delicate patent leather flowers on her shoulder—the latest Soviet fashion—sparkled like her eyes.

The guests entered, logs of wood under their arms. A tall, stern maid in black, with stiff white apron and cap, silently received the logs.

"Kira! Lydia! Darlings! So glad! How are you?" Vava fluttered.

"I've heard so much about you, Leo, that I'm really frightened," she acknowledged the introduction, her hand in Leo's; even Lydia understood Leo's answering glance; as to Vava, she caught her breath and stepped back a little, and looked at Kira. But Kira paid no attention.

To Andrei, Vava said: "So you're a Communist? I think that's charming. I've always said that Communists were just like other people."

The large drawing room had not been heated all winter. The fire had just been lit. A fretful smoke struggled up the chimney, escaping back into the room once in a while. A gray fog hung over the neatly polished mirrors, the freshly dusted tables proudly displaying careful rows of worthless knick-knacks; a damp odor of mildewed wood rose to destroy the painful dignity of a room too obviously prepared for guests.

The guests sat huddled in corners, shivering under old shawls and sweaters, tense and self-conscious and too carelessly nonchalant in their old best clothes. They kept their arms pressed to their sides to hide the holes in their armpits; elbows motionless on their knees—to hide rubbed patches; feet deep under chairs—to hide worn felt boots. They smiled vacantly without purpose, laughed too loudly at nothing in particular, timid and uncomfortable and guiltily conscious of a forbidden purpose, the forgotten purpose of gaiety. They eyed the fireplace wistfully, longing and reluctant to seize upon the best seats by the fire. Everybody was cold and everybody wanted desperately to be gay.

The only one whose bright, loud gaiety seemed effortless was Victor. His wide stride bounced from group to group, offering the tonic of a ringing voice and a resplendent smile: "This way, ladies and gentlemen. . . . Move over to this lovely fire. We'll be warm in an instant. . . . Ah! my charming cousins, Kira and Lydia! . . . Delighted, Comrade Taganov, delighted! . . . Here's a lovely armchair, Lydia darling, I saved it specially for you. . . . Rita dear, you remind me of the heroine in the new Smirnov novel. Read it? Magnificent! Literature emancipated from outworn conceptions of form. A new woman—the free woman of the future. . . . Comrade Taganov, that project for the electrification of the entire R.S.F.S.R. is the most stupendous undertaking in the history of mankind. When we consider the amount of electrical power per citizen to be found in our natural resources. . . . Vava, these patent leather flowers are the latest word in feminine elegance. I understand that the most famous couturier of Paris has . . . I quite agree with you, Boris. Schopenhauer's pessimism is entirely outmoded in the face of the healthy, practical philosophical conceptions of the rising proletariat and, no matter what our personal political convictions may be, we must all be objective enough to agree that the ruling class of the future. . . ."

With perfect assurance, Victor assumed the . . . Vava's dark eyes, that rested on him ever

through the room, sanctioned his right by a long, proud, adoring glance. She flew into the anteroom at every sound of the door bell, returning with a couple that smiled shyly, rubbing their cold hands, hiding the worn seams of their clothes. The solemn maid followed silently, carrying the logs as if she were serving a dish, and piled them neatly by the fireplace.

Kolya Smiatkin, a blond, chubby young man with a pleasant smile, who was filing clerk in the Tobacco Trust, said timidly: "They say . . . er . . . I heard . . . I'm afraid there's going to be a reduction of staffs in our office—next month. Everybody's whispering about it. Maybe I'll get fired this time. Maybe not. Makes you feel sort of uncomfortable."

A tall gentleman with a gold pince-nez and the intense eyes of an undernourished philosopher said lugubriously: "I have an excellent job in the archives. Bread almost every week. Only I'm afraid there's a woman after the job—a Communist's mistress—and . . ."

Someone nudged him and pointed at Andrei, who stood by the fireplace, smoking. The tall gentleman coughed and looked uncomfortable.

Rita Eksler was the only woman in the room who smoked. She lay stretched on a davenport, her legs high on its arm, her skirt high above her knees, red bangs low over pale green eyes, painted lips puckerred insolently around a cigarette. Many things were whispered about her. Her parents had been killed in the revolution. She had married a commander of the Red Army and divorced him two months later. She was homely and used her homeliness with such skillful, audacious emphasis that the most beautiful girls feared her competition.

She stretched lazily and said, her voice slow, husky: "I've heard something amusing. A boy friend of mine wrote from Berlin . . ." All eyes turned to her, eagerly, reverently. ". . . and he tells me they have cafés in Berlin that are open all night—all night, elegant, eh?—they call them 'Naecht Local.' And in a famous, very naughty 'Naecht Local,' a famous dancer—Rikki Rey—danced with sixteen girls and with nothing on. I mean, positively nothing. So she got arrested. And the next night, she and her girls appeared in a military number, and they wore little chiffon trunks, two gold strings crossed over their breasts, and huge fur hats. And they were considered dressed. Elegant, eh?"

She laughed huskily at the awed crowd, but her eyes were on Leo; they had been on Leo ever since he had entered the room. Leo's answer was a straight, mocking glance of under-

standing that insulted and encouraged Rita at the same time.

An anemic girl who sat sulkily in a corner, miserably hiding her feet and heavy felt boots, said with a dull stare, incredulous of her own words: "Abroad . . . I heard . . . they say they don't have provision cards, or co-operatives, or anything. you just go into a store just when you feel like it and just buy bread or potatoes or anything. even sugar. Me, I don't believe it myself."

"And they say you buy your clothes without a trade-union order—abroad."

"We have no future," said the philosopher with the gold pince-nez. "We have lost it in materialistic pursuits. Russia's destiny has ever been of the spirit. Holy Russia has lost her God and her Soul."

"Did you hear about poor Mitya Vessiolkin? He tried to jump off a moving tramway, and he fell under, but he was lucky: just one hand cut off."

"The West," said Victor, "has no inner significance. The old civilization is doomed. It is filling new forms with a worn-out content that can no longer satisfy anyone. We may suffer hardships, but we are building something new. On our side—we have the future."

"I have a cold," said the anemic girl. "Mother got a union order for galoshes and there were none my size and we lost our turn and we have to wait three months and I got a cold."

"Vera Borodina had her Primus explode on her. And she's blind. And her face—you'd think she'd been in the war."

"I bought myself a pair of galoshes in a private store." Kolya Smiatkin said with a touch of pride. "And now I'm afraid but what I was too hasty. What with the reductions of staffs and. . . ."

"Vava, may I add wood to the fire? It's still rather . . . cold."

"The trouble with these days," said Lydia, "is that there's no spiritual enlightenment. People have forgotten the simple faith."

"We had a reduction of staffs last month, but they didn't touch me. I'm socially active. I'm teaching a class of illiterates—free—an hour every evening—as club duty—and they know I'm a conscientious citizen."

"I'm vice-secretary of our club library," said Kolya Smiatkin. "Takes three evenings a week—and no pay—but that's me through the last reduction. But this time, I'm afraid

me or another guy—and the other guy, he's vice-secretary of two libraries."

"When we have a reduction of staffs," said the anemic girl, "I'm afraid they're going to throw out all the wives or husbands whose mates have employment. And Misha has such a fine job with the Food Trust. So we're thinking . . . I'm afraid we'll have to get divorced. Oh, that's nothing. We can still go on living together. It's being done."

"My career is my duty to society," said Victor. "I have selected engineering as the profession most needed by our great republic."

He threw a glance at the fireplace to make sure that Andrei had heard.

"I'm studying philosophy," said Leo, "because it's a science that the proletariat of the R.S.F.S.R. does not need at all."

"Some philosophers," said Andrei slowly, in the midst of a sudden, stunned silence, "may need the proletariat of the R.S.F.S.R."

"Maybe," said Leo. "And maybe I'll escape abroad, and sell my services to the biggest exploiter of a millionaire—and have an affair with his beautiful wife."

"Without a doubt," said Victor, "you'll succeed in *that*."

"Really," Vava said hastily, "I think it's still cold and we had better dance. Lydia darling?"

She threw a cajoling glance of inquiry at Lydia. Lydia sighed with resignation, rose and took the seat at the upright piano. She was the only accomplished musician in the crowd. She had a suspicion about the reason of her popularity at all the rare parties that were still being given. She rubbed her cold fingers and struck the piano keys with ferocious determination. She played "John Gray."

Historians will write of the "Internationale" as the great anthem of the revolution. But the cities of the revolution had their own hymn. In days to come, the men of Petrograd will remember those years of hunger and struggle and hope—to the convulsive rhythm of "John Gray."

It was called a fox-trot. It had a tune and a rhythm such as those of the new dances far across the border, abroad. It had very foreign lyrics about a very foreign John Gray whose sweetheart Kitty spurned his love for fear of having children, as she told him plainly. Petrograd had known sweeping epidemics of cholera; it had known epidemics of typhus, which were worse; the worst of its epidemics was that of "John Gray."

Men stood in line at the co-operatives—and whistled "John Gray." At the recreation hour in schools, young couples danced in the big hall, and an obliging pupil played "John Gray." Men hung on the steps of speeding tramways, humming desperately "John Gray." Workers' clubs listened attentively to a lecture on Marxism, then relaxed while a comrade showed his skill on a piano out of tune, playing "John Gray."

Its gaiety was sad; its abrupt rhythm was hysterical; its frivolity was a plea, a moan for that which existed somewhere, forever out of reach. Through winter nights red flags whistled in the snowdrifts and the city prayed hopelessly with the short, sharp notes of "John Gray."

Lydia played fiercely. Couples shuffled slowly across the drawing room in an old-fashioned two-step. Irina, who had no voice, sang the words, half singing, half coughing them out, in a husky moan, as she had heard a German singer do in vaudeville:

*"John Gray
Was brave and daring,
Kitty
Was very pretty.
Wildly
John fell in love with
Kitty.
Passion's
Hard to restrain—
He made
His feelings plain,
But Kat
Said 'No' to that!"*

Kira danced in Leo's arms. He whispered, looking down at her: "We would dance—like this—in a place of champagne glasses—and spangled gowns—and bare arms—a place called 'Nacht Local.'"

She closed her eyes, and the strong body that led her expertly, imperiously, seemed to carry her to that other world she had seen, long ago, by a dark river that murmured the "Song of Broken Glass."

Vava undertook to teach Andrei to dance and dragged him out into the crowd. He followed obediently, smiling, like a tiger that could not hurt a kitten. He was not a bad pupil, she

thought. She felt very brave, very daring at the thought that she was actually corrupting a stern Communist. She regretted that the corruption could go no further. It was annoying to meet a man in whom her beauty awakened no response, who looked at her with calm, steady eyes, as he looked at Lydia, as he looked at the anemic girl in the felt boots.

Lydia played "Destiny Waltz." Andrei asked Kira to dance. Leo glanced at him with his cold smile, but said nothing and walked away from them.

"Vava's a good teacher," Kira whispered, as Andrei whirled her into the crowd, "but hold me tighter. Oh, yes, much tighter."

"Destiny Waltz" was slow and soft; it stopped for a breathless second once in a while and swung into rhythm again, slowly, rocking a little, as if expecting soft, billowing satin skirts to murmur gently in answer, in a ball-room such as did not exist any longer.

Kira looked up into a grave face that was smiling half ironically, half shyly. She pressed her head to his breast; her eyes flashed up at him one swift glance, like a spark; then she jerked her head back; her tousled hair caught on a button of his coat and a few strands remained entwined around the button.

Andrei felt a very soft silk in his arms and, under the silk, a very slender body. He looked down at her open collar and saw a faint shadow parting the flesh. He did not look down again.

Leo danced with Rita, their eyes meeting in a silent understanding, her body pressed to his expertly, professionally. Vava whirled, smiling proudly at every couple she passed, her hand resting triumphantly, possessively on Victor's shoulder. Kolya Smiatkin watched Vava timidly, wistfully; he was afraid to ask her for a dance: he was shorter than Vava. He knew that everybody knew of his hopeless, doggish devotion to her and that they laughed at him; he could not help it. The anemic girl's felt boots made the chandelier tremble, its fringe of glass beads ringing softly; once she stepped on Vava's sparkling patent leather pump. A thoughtful guest added a log to the fire: it hissed and smoked; someone had not been conscientious and had brought a damp log.

At two A.M. Vava's mother stuck a timid, pallid face through the crack of a half-opened door and asked the guests if they would "like to have some refreshments." The eager rush to the dining room cut a waltz short in the middle.

In the dining room, a long table stood frozen in a solemn

splendor of white and silver, crystal sparkling in a blinding light, delicate forks laid out with formal precision. Costly dishes of milky-white porcelain offered slices of black bread with a suspicion of butter, slices of dried fish, potato-skin cookies, sauerkraut and tea with sticky brown candy instead of sugar.

Vava's mother smiled hospitably: "Please take one of everything. Don't be afraid. There's enough. I've counted them."

Vava's father sat, beaming broadly, at the head of the table. He was a doctor who specialized in gynecology. He had not been successful before the revolution; after the revolution, two facts had helped his rise: the fact that, as a doctor, he belonged to the "Free Professions" and was not considered an exploiter, and the fact that he performed certain not strictly legal operations. Within a couple of years he had found himself suddenly the most prosperous member of his former circle and of many circles above.

He sat, his two fists holding his lapels, leaning back comfortably, his round stomach bulging under a heavy gold chain, costly watch-charms tinkling and shuddering with the muscles of his stomach. His narrow eyes disappeared in the thick folds of a white flesh. He smiled warmly at his guests; he was very proud of the rare, enviable position of host, a host who could afford to offer food; he relished the feeling of a patron and benefactor to the children of those before whom he had bowed in the old days, the children of the industrial magnate Argounov, of Admiral Kovalensky. He made a mental note to donate some more to the Red Air Fleet in the morning.

His smile widened when the maid entered sullenly, carrying a silver tray with six bottles of rare old wine—a token of gratitude from one of his influential patients. He poured, filling crystal glasses, chuckling amiably: "Good old stuff. Real pre-war stuff. Bet you kids never tasted anything like it." The glasses were passed down the long table, from hand to hand.

Kira sat between Leo and Andrei. Andrei raised his glass gravely, steadily, like a warrior. "Your health, Kira," he said.

Leo raised his glass lightly, gracefully, like a diplomat at a foreign bar. "Since you're toasted by my class superior, Kira," he said, "I'll drink to our charming hostess."

Vava answered with a warm, grateful smile. Leo raised his glass to her and drank looking at Rita.

When they returned to the drawing room, the dying fire had to be revived. Lydia played again. A few couples danced lazily.

Vava sang a song about a dead lady whose fingers smelt of

incense. Kolya Smiatkin gave an impersonation of a drunk. Victor told anecdotes. Others followed his example; some of the anecdotes were political; cautious glances were thrown at Andrei; words stopped halfway and the teller stammered, blushing.

At five A.M. everyone was exhausted; but no one could go home before daylight; it was too dangerous. The city militia was helpless against burglars and holdup men. No citizen dared to cross a street after midnight.

Doctor Milovsky and his wife retired, leaving the young guests to await the dawn. The stern, starched maid dragged into the drawing room mattresses borrowed from all the neighbors. The mattresses were lined up against the wall. The maid left. Vava turned out the light.

The guests settled down comfortably, in couples. Nothing pierced the darkness but a last glow in the fireplace, a few red dots of cigarettes, a few whispers, a few suspicious sounds that were not whispers. The unwritten law of parties dictated that no one should be too curious in these last, weary and most exciting hours of a party.

Kira felt Andrei's hand on her arm. "I think they have a balcony," he whispered. "Let's go out."

Following him, Kira heard a sigh and something that sounded like a very passionate kiss from the corner where Vava nestled in Victor's arms.

It was cold on the balcony. The street lay silent like a tunnel under a vault slowly turning gray. Frozen puddles looked like splinters of glass panes on the pavement. Windows looked like puddles frozen on the walls. A militia-man leaned against a lamp post. A flag bent over the street. The flag did not move; neither did the man.

"It's funny," said Andrei, "I never thought I would, but I do like dancing."

"Andrei, I'm angry at you."

"Why?"

"This is the second time that you haven't noticed my best dress."

"It's beautiful."

The door behind them squealed on its rusty hinges. Leo stepped out on the balcony, a cigarette hanging in the corner of his mouth. He asked: "Is Kira nationalized state property, too?"

Andrei answered slowly: "Sometimes I think it would be better for her if she were."

"Well, until the Party passes the proper resolution," said Leo, "she isn't."

They returned into the warm darkness of the drawing room. Leo drew Kira down on the mattress by his side; he said nothing; she drowsed, her head on his shoulder. Rita moved away with a little shrug. Andrei stood by the balcony door, smoking.

At eight A.M. the window curtains were pulled aside. A dull white sky spread over the roofs, like soapy water. Vava muttered good-byes to her guests at the door; she swayed a little, weary circles under her eyes, one dark lock hanging to the tip of her nose, her lipstick smeared over her chin. The guests divided into groups, to walk together in clusters as long as possible.

In the cold dawn, ice breaking under their feet, Andrei took Kira aside for a moment. He pointed at Leo, who was helping Lydia over a puddle a few steps ahead of them. "Do you see him often?" he asked.

The question told her that he had not learned the truth; the tone of the question—that she would not tell him.

Lights burned in the windows of barred, padlocked shops. Many doors carried a notice:

"Comrade burglars, please don't bother. There's nothing inside."

XIII

In the summer, Petrograd was a furnace.

The wooden bricks of the pavements cracked into black gashes, dry as an empty river bed. The walls seemed to breathe of fever and the roofs smelt of burned paint. Through eyes hazy in a white glare, men looked hopelessly for a tree in the city of stone. When they found a tree, they turned away: its motionless leaves were gray with parched dust. Hair stuck to foreheads. Horses shook flies off their foaming nostrils. The Neva lay still; little drops of fire played lazily on the water, like clusters of spangles, and made the men on the bridges feel hotter.

Whenever they could, Kira and Leo went away for a day in the country.

They walked hand in hand in the stripes of sun and pine shadows. Like columns of dark brick, like sinewy bodies sun-burnt to bronze and peeling in strips of light bark, the pines guarded the road and dropped, jealously, through a heavy tangle of malachite, a few rays, a few strips of soft blue. On the green slopes of ditches, little purple dots of violets bent to a patch of yellow sand; and only the crystal luster of the sand showed water over it. Kira took off her shoes and stockings. Soft dust and pine needles between her toes, she kicked the little black balls of fallen pine cones. Leo swung her slippers at the end of a dry branch, his white shirt unbuttoned, his sleeves rolled above his elbows. Her bare feet pattered over the boards of an old bridge. Through the wide cracks, she saw sparks swimming like fish scales down the stream and polliwogs wiggling in swarms of little black commas.

They sat alone in a meadow. Tall grass rose like a wall around them, over their heads; a hot blue sky descended to the sharp, green tips; the sky seemed to smell of clover. A cricket droned like an electric engine. She sat on the ground; Leo lay stretched, his head on her lap. He chewed the end of a long grass stem; the movement of his hand, holding it, had the perfection of a foreign cigarette ad. Once in a while, she bent down to kiss him.

They sat on a huge tree root over a river. The spreading stars of ferns on the slope below looked like a jungle of dwarf palms. The white trunk of a birch tree sparkled in the sun, its leaves like a waterfall that streamed down, green drops remaining suspended in the air, trembling, turning silver and white and green again, dropping once in a while to be swept away by the current. Kira leaped over the rocks, roots and ferns as swift, agile and joyous as an animal. Leo watched her. Her movements were sharp, angular, inexpressibly graceful in that contradiction of all grace, not the soft, fluent movements of a woman, but the broken, jerking, precise, geometrical movements of a futuristic dancer. He watched her perched on a dead tree trunk, looking down into the water, her hands at straight angles to her arms, her elbows at straight angles to her body, her body at a straight angle to her legs, a wild, broken little figure, tense, living, like a lightning in shape. Then he sprang up, and ran after her, and held her, breaking the straight angles into a straight line crushed against him. The dead trunk hanging over the stream creaked perilously. She laughed, that strange laughter of hers which was too joyous to

be gay, a laughter that held a challenge, and triumph, and ecstasy. Her lips were moist, glistening.

*

When they returned to the city, the stifling dusk met them with posters, and banners, and headlines, four letters flaming over the streets:

U.S.S.R.

The country had a new name and a new constitution. The All-Union Congress of Soviets had just decided so. Banners said:

THE UNION OF SOCIALIST SOVIET REPUBLICS IS THE KERNEL FOR
THE FUTURE GROWTH OF A WORLD STATE

Demonstrations marched through the hot, dusty streets, red kerchiefs mopping sweating foreheads.

OUR POWER IS IN THE TIGHT WELDING OF THE COLLECTIVE!

A column of children, drums beating, marched into the sunset: a layer of bare legs, and a layer of blue trunks, and a layer of white shirts, and a layer of red ties; the kindergarten of the Party, the "Pioneers." Their high, young voices sang:

*"To the greedy bourgeois' sorrow
We shall light our fire tomorrow,
Our world fire of blood. . . ."*

*

Once, Kira and Leo attempted to spend a night in the country.

"Certainly," said the landlady. "Certainly, citizens. I can let you have a room for the night. But first you must get a certificate from your Upravdom as to where you live in the city, and a permit from your militia department, and then you must bring me your labor books, and I must register them with our Soviet here, and our militia department, and get a permit for you as transient guests, and there's a tax to pay, and then you can have the room."

They stayed in the city.

*

"Kira, I knew I'd be glad to see you again. But I didn't know that I'd be so . . . happy."

"You've had a hard summer, haven't you, Andrei?"

"Thank you for your letters. They've kept me cheerful."

She looked at the grimness of his lips. "What have they done to you, Andrei?"

"Who?" But he knew that she knew. He did not look at her, but he answered: "Well, I guess everybody knows it. The villages—that's the dark spot on our future. They're not conquered. They're not with us. They have a red flag over the local Soviet and a knife behind their backs. They bow, and they nod, and they snicker in their beards. They stick pictures of Lenin over the barns where they hide their grain from us. You've read in the papers about the Clubhouse they burned and the three Communists they burned in it—alive. I was there the next day."

"Andrei! I hope you got them!"

He could not restrain a smile: "Why, Kira! Are you saying that about men who fight Communism?"

"But . . . but they could have done it to *you*."

"Well, nothing happened to me, as you see. Don't look at that scar on my neck. Just grazed. The fool wasn't used to firearms. His aim wasn't very good."

*

The boss of the Gossizdat had five pictures on the walls of his office: one of Karl Marx, one of Trotzky, one of Zinoviev and two of Lenin. On his desk stood two small plaster busts: of Lenin and Karl Marx. He wore a high-collared peasant blouse of expensive black satin.

He looked at his manicured fingernails; then he looked at Leo. "I feel certain, Comrade Kovalensky, that you will welcome this opportunity to do your duty in our great cultural drive, as we all do."

Leo asked: "What do you want?"

"This organization has taken the honorary post of '*Cult-chef*' to a division of the Baltfleet. You understand what I mean, of course? In line with the new—and brilliant—move of the Party toward a wider spread of education and Proletarian Culture, we have accepted the position of 'Cultural Chief' to a less enlightened unit, as all institutions of note have done. We are thus responsible for the cultural advancement of our brave brothers of the Baltic Fleet. Such is our modest

contribution to the gigantic rise of the new civilization of the new ruling class."

"Fine," said Leo. "What do you want me to do about it?"

"I think it is obvious, Comrade Kovalensky. We are organizing a free night school for our protégés. With your knowledge of foreign languages—I had a class of German in mind, twice a week—Germany is the cornerstone of our future diplomacy and the next step of the world revolution—and a class of English, once a week. Of course, you are not to expect any financial remuneration for this work, your services are to be donated, inasmuch as this is not an undertaking of the government, but our strictly voluntary gift to the State."

"Since the beginning of the revolution," said Leo, "I haven't been buying gifts for anyone, neither for my friends—nor otherwise. I can't afford them."

"Comrade Kovalensky, did it ever occur to you to consider what we think of men who merely work for their pay and take no part in social activity in their spare time?"

"Did it ever occur to you that I have a life to live—in my spare time?"

The man at the desk looked at the five pictures on his walls. "The Soviet State recognizes no life but that of a social class."

"I don't think we shall go into a discussion of the subject."

"In other words, you refuse to do your share?"

"I do."

"Very well. This service is not compulsory. Oh, not in the least. Its meaning and novelty is the free will of those participating. I was merely thinking of your own good when I made the offer. I thought, in view of certain events in your past, that you'd be only too glad to. . . . Never mind. However, I must call to your attention the fact that Comrade Zoubikov of the Communist Cell has been rather unpleasant about a man of your social past on our pay roll. And when he hears about this. . . ."

"When he does," said Leo. "tell him to come to me. I'll give him a free lesson—if he cares for the subject."

*

Leo came home earlier than usual.

The blue flame of the Primus hissed in the gathering dusk. Kira's white apron was a white spot bending over the Primus.

Leo threw his cap and brief case on the table. "That's that," he said. "I'm out."

Kira stood holding a spoon. She asked: "You mean . . . the Gossizdat?"

"Yes. Fired. Reduction of staffs. Getting rid of the undesirable element. Told me I had a bourgeois attitude. I'm not social-minded."

"Well . . . well, it's all right. We'll get along."

"Of course, it's all right. Think I care about their damn job? This affects me no more than a change in weather."

"Certainly. Now take your coat off and wash your hands, and we'll have dinner."

"Dinner? What do you have there?"

"Beet soup. You like it."

"When did I say I liked it? I don't want any dinner. I'm not hungry. I'm going to the bedroom to study. Please don't disturb me."

"I won't."

Left alone, Kira took a towel and lifted the cover of the pan and stirred the soup, slowly, deliberately, longer than it required. Then she took a plate from the shelf. As she was carrying it to the table, she saw that the plate was trembling. She stopped and, in the dusk, whispered, addressing herself for the first time in her life, as if speaking to a person she had never met before: "Now, Kira, you don't. You don't. You don't."

She stood and held the plate over the table and stared down, all her will in her eyes, as if a great issue depended on the plate. Presently the plate stopped trembling.

*

When he had stood in line for an hour, he smoked a cigarette.

When he had stood for two hours, he began to feel that his legs were numb.

When he had stood for three hours, he felt that the numbness had risen to his throat, and he had to lean against a wall.

When his turn came, the editor looked at Leo and said: "I don't see how we can use you, citizen. Of course, our publication is strictly artistic. But—Proletarian Art, I may remind you. Strictly class viewpoint. You do not belong to the Party—nor is your social standing suitable, you must agree. I have ten experienced reporters—Party members—on my waiting list."

*

She really didn't have to fry fish in lard, Kira decided. She could use sunflower-seed oil. If she bought good oil it would leave no odor and it was cheaper. She counted the money out carefully over the co-operative counter and walked home, cautiously watching the heavy yellow liquid in a greasy bottle.

*

The secretary said to Leo: "Sorry you had to wait so long, citizen, but the comrade editor is a very busy man. You can go in now."

The comrade editor leaned back in his chair; he held a bronze paper knife; the knife tapped the edge of a desk calendar bearing a picture of Lunacharsky, People's Commissar of Education and Art; the editor's voice sounded like a knife cutting paper:

"No. No opening. None expected. Plenty of proletarians starving and you bourgeois asking for a job. I'm a proletarian myself. Straight from the work-bench. I've been jobless—in the old days. But your bourgeois class brothers had no pity. It'll do you good to learn how it feels on your own hide."

*

"It's a misunderstanding, citizens. Help interview hours are from nine to eleven, Thursday only. . . . An hour and a half? Well, how did I know what you were sitting here for? Nobody asked you to sit."

*

When he came home in the evenings, he was silent.

Kira served dinner and he sat down at the table and ate. She had given great care to the dinner. He said nothing. He did not look into the steady gray eyes across the table, nor at the lips that smiled gently. He offered no complaint and no consolation.

Sometimes, for many long moments, he stood before the crystal vase on the malachite stand, the one that had not been broken, and looked at it, his eyes expressionless, his hands in his pockets, a cigarette hanging in the corner of his mouth; he stood without moving, without blinking, the smoke alone stirring slowly, swaying. Then he smiled and the cigarette fell to the floor, and burned, smoking, a dark ring widening on the parquet; but he did not notice it; and Kira did not notice it, for her eyes were fixed, wide and frightened, on Leo's icy, sardonic smile.

*

"Any past experience, citizen?"

"No."

"Party member?"

"No."

"Sorry. No opening. Next."

*

It was Monday and the job had been promised to him for Monday. Leo stood before the little wizened office manager and knew that he should smile gratefully. But Leo never smiled when he knew he should. And perhaps it would have been useless. The office manager met him with a worried, apologetic look and avoided his eyes.

"So sorry, citizen. Yes, I promised you this job, but—you see, the big boss' cousin came from Moscow and she's unemployed, and. . . . Unforeseen circumstances, citizen. You know—man proposes and God disposes. . . . Come again, citizen."

*

Kira went to the Institute less frequently.

But when she sat in a long, cold room and listened to lectures about steel, and bolts, and kilowatts, she straightened her shoulders as if a wrench had tightened the wires of her nerves. She looked at the man who sat beside her; at times she wondered whether those words about steel beams and girders were not about his bones and muscles, a man for whom steel had been created, or, perhaps, it was he that had been created for steel, and concrete, and white heat; she had long since forgotten where Andrei Taganov's life ended and that of engines began.

When he questioned her solicitously, she answered: "Andrei, any circles under my eyes are nothing but your own imagination. And you've never been in the habit of thinking about my eyes."

*

When Leo sat down at the table, Kira's smile was a little forced.

"You see, there's no dinner tonight," she explained softly. "That is, no real dinner. Just this bread. The co-operative ran out of millet before my turn came. But I got the bread. That's

your portion. And I've fried some onions in sunflower-seed oil. They're very good on the bread."

"Where's your portion?"

"I've . . . eaten it already. before you came."

"How much did you get this week?"

"Oh . . . well . . . they gave us a whole pound, imagine?

Instead of the usual half. Nice, isn't it?"

"Yes. Very. Only I'm not hungry. I'm going to bed."

*

The little man next to Leo in line had an uncomfortable laugh, a servile, hissing sound at his palate, that did not reach his throat, as if he repeated mirthlessly the printed letters: "h-ee-h-ee."

"I see you're looking at the red handkerchief in my breast pocket, citizen, hee-hee," he whispered confidentially into Leo's ear. "I'll let you in on a secret. It's no handkerchief at all. See? Just a little silk rag. When you go in, they think at first glance that it's a Party badge or something, hee-hee. Then they see it ain't, but still there's the psychological effect, hee-hee. Helps—if they have an opening for a job. . . . Go on. Your turn. Lord Jesus Christ! It's dark outside already. How time flies in lines, citizen. Hee-hee."

*

At the University co-operative, the student in line ahead of Leo said aloud to a companion, both wearing Party badges: "Funny, isn't it? the way some citizens neglect their lectures, but you're sure to find them in line for food rations."

Leo said to the clerk behind the counter, trying to make his voice pleading and making it only wooden, expressionless: "Comrade clerk, would you mind if I tear next week's coupon off, too? I'll keep it and present it to you for my bread next week. You see, I have . . . there's someone at home and I want to tell her that I got a two weeks' ration and ate my half on the way home, so that she'll eat all of this piece. . . . Thank you, comrade."

*

The burly office manager led Leo down a narrow corridor into an empty office with Lenin's picture on the wall, and closed the door carefully. He had a friendly smile and heavy cheeks.

"More privacy here, citizen. It's like this, citizen. A job's

a rare thing, nowadays. A very rare thing. Now, a comrade that's got a responsible position and has jobs to hand out—he's got something valuable to hand out, hasn't he? Now then, a comrade that's got a responsible position isn't making much of a salary these days. And things are expensive. One's got to live. A fellow that gets a job has something to be grateful for, hasn't he? . . . Near broke, you say? Well, what do you want here, you bum? Expecting us proletarians to give jobs to every stray bourgeois?"

*

"English, German and French? Valuable, very valuable, citizen. We do need teachers for classes of languages. Are you a Union member? . . . Not any Trade Union? . . . Sorry, citizen, we employ only Union members."

*

"So you want to join the Union of Pedagogues? Very well, citizen. Where are you working?"

"I'm not working."

"You cannot join the Union if you're not working."

"I can't get a job if I'm not a Union member."

"If you have no job, you can't become a Union member. Next!"

*

"Half a pound of linseed oil, please. The one that's not too rancid, please, if you can. . . . No, I can't take sunflower-seed oil, it's too expensive."

*

"Kira! What are you doing here in your nightgown?"

He raised his head from the book. A single bulb over the table left shadows in the corners of the drawing room and in the circles under Leo's eyes. Kira's white nightgown trembled in the darkness.

"It's after three . . ." she whispered.

"I know it. But I have to study. There's a draft here. Please go back to bed. You're trembling."

"Leo, you'll wear yourself out."

"Well, and if I do? That'll be the end of it, so much the quicker."

He guessed the look of the eyes he could not see in the dark-

ness. He got up and gathered the trembling white shadow in his arms.

"Kira, of course I don't mean it. . . . Just one kiss, if you go back to bed. . . . Even your lips are cold. . . . If you don't go, I'll carry you back."

He lifted her in two arms, still strong and firm and warm through her nightgown. He carried her back into the bedroom, his head pressed close to hers, whispering: "Just a few more pages and I'll be with you. Go to sleep. Good night. Don't worry."

*

"In my duty of Upravdom, Citizen Argounova, I gotta tell you. Laws is laws. The rent's raised on account of neither of you citizens being a Soviet employee. That puts you in the category of persons living off an income. . . . How do I know what income? Laws is laws."

*

Behind him, men stood in line; men cringing, shrinking, crouching; hollow chests and hunched shoulders; yellow hands clasped and trembling; a few last convulsions in the depths of extinguished souls; eyes staring with a forlorn hopelessness, a dull horror, a crushed plea; a line like that at a stock yard. He stood among them, tall, straight, young, a god's form with lips that were still proud.

A streetwalker passed by and stopped; and looked, startled, at that man among the others; and winked an invitation. He did not move, only turned his head away.

XIV

A house collapsed, early one afternoon. The front wall crashed, with a shower of bricks, in a white cloud of limey dust. Coming back from work, the inhabitants saw their bedrooms exposed to the cold light of the street, like tiers of stage settings; an upright piano, caught by a naked beam, hung precariously high over the pavement. There were a few weary moans, but no astonishment: houses, long since in need of repair.

WE THE LIVING

sed without warning all over the city. Old bricks were piled h over the tramway rails and stopped traffic. Leo got a job two days, clearing the street. He worked, bending and rising, bending and rising, through many hours, a numb ache his spine, red dust on bleeding fingers stiff and raw in the id.

The Museum of the Revolution had an exhibition in honor the visiting delegates of a Swedish Trade Union. Kira got job lettering cardboard inscriptions. She bent through four ng evenings, eyes dull, hands trembling over a ruler, painfully tracing even black letters that said: "WORKERS STARV- NG IN THE TENEMENTS OF THE CAPITALISTIC EXPLOITERS OF 910," "WORKERS EXILED TO SIBERIA BY THE CZARIST GEN- ARMES OF 1905."

Snow grew in white drifts in the gutters, under basement windows. Leo shovelled snow for three nights; his breath fluttering in spurts of white vapor, icicles sparkling on the old scarf wound tightly around his neck.

A citizen of no visible means of support, who owned an automobile and a five-room apartment, and who held long, whispered conversations with officials of the Food Trust, decided that his children had to speak French. Kira gave lessons twice a week, dully explaining the "passé imparfait" to two haggard brats who wiped their noses with their fingers, her voice hoarse, her head swimming, her eyes avoiding the let where glossy white muffins sparkled with brown, well-crusted.

Leo helped a proletarian student who had an examination pass. He explained slowly the laws of capital and interest to a sleepy fellow who scratched his knuckles, for he had the itch.

Kira washed dishes two hours a day, bending over a greasy tub that smelt of old fish, in a private restaurant—until it failed.

They disappeared for hours every day and when they came home they never asked each other in what lines they had stood, what streets they had trudged wearily to what doors closed brusquely before them. At night, Kira lighted the "Bourgeoise" and they sat silently, bent over their books. They still had things to study and one goal to remember, if all the others had to be forgotten: to graduate. "It doesn't matter," Kira had said. "Nothing matters. We mustn't think. We mustn't think at all. We must remember only that we have to be ready and then . . . maybe . . . maybe we'll find a way to go

abro. . . ." She had not finished. She could not pronounce the word. That word was like a silent, secret wound deep in both of them.

Sometimes they read the newspapers. Comrade Zinoviev, president of the Petrograd Soviet, said: "The world revolution is not a matter of years, comrades, not a matter of months, but a matter of days now. The flame of a Proletarian Uprising will sweep the Earth, wiping out forever the Curse of World Capitalism."

There was also an interview with Comrade Biriuchin, third stoker on a Red battleship. Comrade Biriuchin said: "Well, and then we gotta keep the machines oiled, and again we gotta look out for rust, seeing as how it's up to us to watch over the people's engines, and we being conscientious proletarians, we do our share, on account of we don't care for no nonsense outside of good, practical work, and again, there's the foreign bourgeois watching us, and . . ."

Sometimes they read the magazines.

". . . Masha looked at him coldly.

"I fear that our ideologies are too far apart. We are born into different social classes. The bourgeois prejudices are too deep-rooted in your consciousness. I am a daughter of the toiling masses. Individual love is a bourgeois prejudice.

"Is this the end, Masha?" he asked hoarsely, a deathly pallor spreading on his handsome, but bourgeois face.

"Yes, Ivan," said she, "it is the end. I am the new woman of a new day."

There was also poetry to read:

*". . . My heart is a tractor raking the soil,
My soul is smoke from the factory oil. . . ."*

Once they went to a motion picture.

It was an American film. In the bright glare of showcases, clusters of shadows stood gazing wistfully at the breath-taking, incredible, *foreign* stills; big snowflakes crashed into the glass; the eager faces smiled faintly, as if with the same thought, the thought that glass—and more than glass—protected this distant, miraculous world from the hopeless Russian winter.

Kira and Leo waited, jammed in the crowd of the foyer. When a show ended and the doors were opened, the crowd tore forward, knocking aside those who tried to come out, squeezing in through the two narrow doors, painfully, furiously.

ously, with a brutal despair, like meat ground through a tight grinder.

The title of the picture shivered in huge white letters:

"THE GOLDEN OCTOPUS"

DIRECTED BY REGINALD MOORE

CENSORED BY COMRADE M. ZAVADKOV

The picture was puzzling. It trembled and flickered, showing a hazy office where blurred shadows of people jerked convulsively. An English sign on the office wall was misspelled. The office was that of an American Trade Union where a stern comrade entrusted the hero—a blondish, dark-eyed young man—with the recovery of documents of vast importance to the Union, stolen by a capitalist.

"Hell!" whispered Leo. "Do they also make pictures like that in America?"

Suddenly, as if a fog had lifted, the photography cleared. They could see the soft line of lipstick and every hair of the long lashes of a beautiful, smiling leading lady. Men and women in magnificently foreign clothes moved gracefully through a story that made no sense. The subtitles did not match the action. The subtitles clamored in glaring white letters about the suffering of "our American brothers under the capitalist yoke." On the screen, gay people laughed happily, danced in sparkling halls, ran down sandy beaches, their hair in the wind, the muscles of their young arms taut, glistening, monstrously healthy. A woman left her room wearing a white dress and emerged on the street in a black suit. The hero had suddenly grown taller, thinner, very blond and blue-eyed. His trim full-dress suit was surprising on a toiling Trade Union member; and the papers he was seeking through the incoherent jumble of events seemed suspiciously close to something like a will for his uncle's inheritance.

A subtitle said: "I hate you. You are a blood-sucking capitalist exploiter. Get out of my room!"

On the screen, a man was bending over the hand of a delicate lady, pressing it slowly to his lips, while she looked at him sadly, and gently stroked his hair.

The end of the picture was not shown. It finished abruptly, as if torn off. A subtitle concluded: "Six months later the bloodthirsty capitalist met his death at the hands of striking workers. Our hero renounced the joys of a selfish love into

which the bourgeois siren had tried to lure him, and he dedicated his life to the cause of the World Revolution."

"I know," said Kira, when they were leaving the theater. "I know what they've done! They've shot that beginning here themselves. They've cut the picture to pieces!"

An usher who heard her, chuckled.

*

Sometimes the door bell rang and the Upravdom came in to remind them of the house meeting of all tenants on an urgent matter. He said: "No exceptions, citizens. Social duty comes above all. Every tenant gotta attend the meeting."

Then Kira and Leo filed into the largest room of the house, a long, bare room with one electric bulb in the ceiling, in the apartment of a street-car conductor who had offered it graciously for the social duty. Tenants came bringing their own chairs and sat chewing sunflower seeds. Those who brought no chairs sat on the floor and chewed sunflower seeds.

"Seeing as how I'm the Upravdom," said the Upravdom, "I declare this meeting of the tenants of the house Number —on Sergievskaja Street open. On the order of the day is the question as regards the chimneys. Now, comrade citizens, seeing as how we are all responsible citizens and conscious of the proper class consciousness, we gotta understand that this ain't the old days when we had landlords and didn't care what happened to the house we lived in. Now this is different, comrades. Owing to the new régime and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and seeing as how the chimneys are clogged, we gotta do something about it, seeing as how we're the owners of the house. Now if the chimneys are clogged, we'll have the house full of smoke, and if we have the house full of smoke, it's sloppy, and if we're sloppy, that's not true proletarian discipline. And so, comrade citizens. . . ."

Housewives fidgeted nervously, sniffing the odor of burning food. A fat man in a red shirt was twiddling his thumbs. A young man with a mouth hanging open, was scratching his head.

". . . and the special assessment will be divided in proportion to the. . . . Is that you, Comrade Kira Argounova, trying to sneak out? Well, you better don't. You know what we think of people that sabotage their social duties. . . . And the special assessment will be divided in proportion to the social standing of the tenants. The workers pay three per cent and the Free Professions ten, and the Private Traders and un-

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employed—the rest. Who's for—raise your hands. . . . Comrade secretary, count the citizens' hands: . . . Who's against—raise your hands. . . . Comrade Michliuk, you can't raise your hand for and against on the one and same proposition. . . .”

*

Victor's visit was unexpected and inexplicable.

He stretched his hands to the "Bourgeoise," rubbed them energetically, smiled cheerfully at Kira and Leo.

"Just passing by and thought I'd drop in. . . . It's a charming place you have here. Irina's been telling me about it. . . . She's fine, thank you. . . . No, mother's not so well. The doctor said there's nothing he can do if we don't send her south. And who can think of affording a trip these days? . . . Been busy at the Institute. Re-elected to Students' Council. . . . Do you read poetry? Just read some verses by a woman. Exquisite delicacy of feeling. . . . Yes, it's a lovely place you have here. Pre-revolutionary luxury. . . . You two are quite the bourgeois, aren't you? Two huge rooms like these. No trouble with the Domicile Norm? We've had two tenants forced upon us last week. One's a Communist. Father's just gritting his teeth. Irina has to share her room with Acia, and they fight like dogs. . . . What can one do? People have to have a roof over their heads. . . . Yes, Petrograd an overerowed city, Petrograd certainly is."

*

She came in, a red bandana on her hair, streaks of powder on her nose, a bundle tied in a white sheet in her hand, one black stocking hanging out of the bundle. She asked: "Where's that drawing room?"

Kira asked, startled: "What do you want, citizen?"

The girl did not answer. She opened the first door she saw, which led to the tenant's room. She slammed it shut. She opened the other door and walked into the drawing room.

"That's it," she said. "You can get your 'Bourgeoise' out—and your dishes and other trash. I have my own."

"What do you want, citizen?" Kira repeated.

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "Here."

She handed to Kira a crumpled scrap of paper with a big official stamp. It was an order from the Gilotdel, giving Citizen Marina Lavrova the right to occupy the room known as "drawing room" in apartment Number 22, house Number—

on Sergievskaja Street; it requested the present occupants to vacate the room immediately, removing only "personal effects of immediate necessity."

"Why, it's impossible!" Kira gasped.

The girl laughed. "Get going, citizen, get going."

"Listen, you. Get out of here peacefully. You won't get this room."

"No? Who's going to stop me? You?"

She walked to a chair, saw Kira's apron on it, threw it to the floor and put her bundle on the chair.

Slamming the door behind her, Kira raced up the stairs, three floors up, to the Upravdom's apartment, and stood panting, knocking at the door ferociously.

The Upravdom opened the door and listened to her story, frowning.

"Order from the Gilotdel?" he said. "That's funny they didn't notify me. That's irregular. I'll put the citizen in her proper place."

"Comrade Upravdom, you know very well it's against the law. Citizen Kovalensky and I are not married. We're entitled to separate rooms."

"You sure are."

Kira had been paid for a month of lessons the day before. She took the little roll of bills from her pocket and, without looking at it, without counting, thrust it all into the Upravdom's hand.

"Comrade Upravdom, I'm not in the habit of begging for help, but please, oh! please, get her out. It would . . . it would simply mean the end for us."

The Upravdom slipped the bills into his pocket furtively, then looked straight at Kira, openly and innocently, as if nothing had happened. "Don't you worry, Citizen Argounova. We know our duty. We'll fix the lady. We'll throw her out on her behind in the gutter where she belongs."

He slammed his hat over one ear and followed Kira downstairs.

"Look here, citizen, what's all this about?" the Upravdom asked sternly.

Citizen Marina Lavrova had taken her coat off and opened her bundle. She wore a tailored white shirt, an old skirt, a necklace of imitation pearls, and slippers with very high heels. She had piled underwear, books and a teapot in a jumble on the table.

tures of Trotzky, Marx, Engels and Rosa Luxemburg; also—a poster representing the Spirit of the Red Air Fleet. She had a gramophone. Late into the night, she played old records, of which her favorite was a song about Napoleon's defeat in Russia—"It roared, it flamed, the fire of Moscow." When she was tired of the gramophone, she played the "Dog's Waltz" on the grand piano.

The bathroom had to be reached through the bedroom. Marisha kept shuffling in and out, wearing a faded, unfastened bathrobe.

"When you have to go through, I wish you'd knock," Kira told her.

"What for? It's not your bathroom."

*

Marisha was a student of the University Rabfac.

The Rabfacs were special workers' faculties with an academic program a little less exacting than that of the University, with a program of revolutionary sciences a great deal more exacting, and with an admission on the strictest proletarian basis.

Marisha disliked Kira, but spoke to Leo at times. She flung the door open so that her posters rustled on the walls, and yelled imperiously: "Citizen Kovalensky, can you help me with this damn French history? What century did they burn Martin Luther in? Or was that Germany? Or did they burn him?"

At other times she flung the door open and announced to no one in particular: "I'm going to the Komsomol Club meeting. If Comrade Rilenko comes, tell him he'll find me at the Club. But if that louse Mishka Gvozdev comes, tell him I've gone to America. You know who he is—the little one with the wart on his nose."

She came in, a cup in her hand: "Citizen Argounova, can I borrow some lard? Didn't know I was all out of it. . . . Nothing but linseed oil? How can you eat that stinking stuff? Well, gimme half a cup."

Going out at seven in the morning, passing through her room, Leo found Marisha asleep, her head on a table littered with books. Marisha jerked, awakening with a start at the sound of his steps.

"Oh, damnation!" she yawned, stretching. "It's this paper I have to read at the Marxist Circle tonight, for our less enlightened comrades—on the 'Social Significance of Electricity

as a Historical Factor.' Citizen Kovalensky, who the hell is Edison?"

Late at night they could hear her coming home. She slammed the door and threw her books on a chair, and they could hear the books scattering over the floor, and her voice intermingled with the deep, adolescent basso of Comrade Rilenko: "Aleshka, pal, be an angel. Light that damn Primus. I'm starving."

Aleshka's steps shuffled across the room, and the Primus hissed.

"You're an angel, Aleshka. Always said you were an angel. I'm tired like a dray-horse. The Rabfac this morning; the Komsomol Club at noon; a committee on day-nurseries in factories at one-thirty; the Marxist Circle at two; demonstration against Illiteracy at three—and do my feet sweat!—lecture on Electrification at four; at seven—editors' board of the Wall Newspaper—I'm gonna be editor; meeting of the women houseworkers at seven-thirty or something; conference on our comrades in Hungary at. . . . You can't say your girl friend ain't class-minded and socially active, Aleshka, you really can't say it."

Aleshka sat at the piano and played "John Gray."

Once, in the middle of the night, Kira was awakened by someone slinking furtively into the bathroom. She caught a glimpse of an undressed boy with blond hair. There was no light in Marisha's room.

*

One evening, Kira heard a familiar voice behind the door. A man was saying: "Of course, we're friends. You know we are. Perhaps—perhaps there's more—on my part—but I do not dare to hope. I've proven my devotion to you. You know the favor I've done you. Now, do one for me. I want to meet that Party friend of yours."

Passing through Marisha's room, on her way out, Kira stopped short. She saw Victor sitting on the davenport, holding Marisha's hand. He jumped up, his temples reddened.

"Victor! Were you coming to see me or . . ." Her voice broke off; she understood.

"Kira, I don't want you to think that I . . ." Victor was saying.

Kira was running out of the room, out of the lobby, down the stairs.

When she told Leo about it, he threatened to

bone in Victor's body. She begged him to keep quiet. "If you raise this issue, his father will know. It will break Uncle Vasili and he's so unhappy as it is. What's the use? We won't get the room back."

*

In the Institute co-operative, Kira met Comrade Sonia and Pavel Syerov. Comrade Sonia was chewing a crust of bread broken off the loaf she had received. Pavel Syerov looked as trim as a military fashion plate. He smiled effusively: "How are you, Comrade Argounova? We don't see you so often at the Institute these days."

"I've been busy."

"We don't see you with Comrade Taganov any more. You two haven't quarreled, have you?"

"Why does that interest you?"

"Oh, it's of no particular interest to me personally."

"But it does interest us as a Party duty," Comrade Sonia remarked sternly. "Comrade Taganov is a valuable Party worker. Naturally, we are concerned, for his friendship with a woman of your social origin might hurt his Party standing."

"Nonsense, Sonia, nonsense," Pavel Syerov protested with sudden eagerness. "Andrei's Party standing is too high. Nothing can hurt it. Comrade Argounova doesn't have to worry and break off a lovely friendship."

Kira looked at him fixedly and asked: "But his Party standing does worry you because it's so high, doesn't it?"

"Why, Comrade Taganov is a very good friend of mine and . . ."

"Are *you* a very good friend of his?"

"A peculiar question, Comrade Argounova."

"One does hear peculiar things nowadays, doesn't one? Good day, Comrade Syerov."

*

Marisha came in when Kira was alone. Her little pouting mouth was swollen; her eyes were red, swollen with tears. She asked sullenly: "Citizen Argounova, what do you use to keep from having children?"

Kira looked at her, startled.

"I'm afraid I'm in trouble," Marisha wailed. "It's that damn louse Aleshka Rilenko. Said I'd be bourgeois if I didn't let him. . . . Said he'd be careful. What am I gonna do? What am I gonna do?"

Kira said she didn't know.

*

For three weeks, Kira worked secretly on a new dress. It was only her old dress, but slowly, painfully, awkwardly, she managed to turn it inside out. The blue wool was smooth and silky on the inside; it looked almost fresh. It was to be a surprise for Leo; she worked on it at night when he had gone to bed. She put a candle on the floor and opened the big mirror door of the wardrobe and used it as a screen, crouching on the floor behind it, by the candle. She had never learned how to sew. Her fingers moved slowly, helplessly. She wiped drops of blood on her petticoat, when she pricked her finger with the needle. Her eyes felt as if tiny needles pricked them continuously from behind the lids; and her lids felt so heavy that when she blinked they stayed closed and it took an effort to pull them open to the huge yellow glare of the candle. Somewhere in the darkness, behind the yellow glare, Leo breathed heavily in his sleep.

The dress was ready on the day when she met Vava in the street. Vava was smiling happily, mysteriously once in a while, for no apparent reason, smiling at a secret thought of her own. They walked home together, and Vava could not resist it any longer: "Won't you come in, Kira?" she begged. "For just a second? I have something to show you. Something—from abroad."

Vava's room smelt of perfume and clean linen. A big teddy-bear with a pink bow sat on the white lace cover of her bed.

Vava opened a parcel carefully wrapped in tissue paper. She handled the objects inside with a frightened reverence, with delicate, trembling fingers. The parcel contained two pairs of silk stockings and a black celluloid bracelet.

Kira gasped. She extended her hand. She hesitated. She touched a stocking with her finger tips, caressing it timidly, like the fur of a priceless animal.

"It's smuggled," Vava whispered. "A lady—father's patient—her husband's in the business—they smuggled it from Riga. And the bracelet—that's their latest fashion abroad. Imagine? Fake jewelry. Isn't it fascinating?"

Kira held the bracelet reverently on the palm of her hand; she did not dare to slip it on.

Vava asked suddenly, timidly, without smiling: "Kira, do you like Victor?"

"He's fine."

"I . . . I haven't seen him for some time. Well, I know, he's so busy. I've given up all my dates, waiting for him to. . . . Oh, well, he's such an active person. . . . I'm so happy over these stockings. I'll wear them when . . . when he comes. I just had to throw out my last silk pair this morning."

"You . . . threw them out?"

"Why, yes. I think they're still in the waste basket. They're ruined. One has a big run in the back."

"Vava . . . could I have them?"

"What? The torn ones? But they're no good."

"It's just . . . just for a joke."

Kira went home, clutching a soft little ball in her pocket. She kept her hand in her pocket. She could not let it go.

When Leo came in, that evening, his hand opened the door and flung his brief case into the room. The brief case opened, spilling the books over the floor. Then he came in.

He did not take his coat off; he walked straight to the "Bourgeoise" and stood, his blue hands extended to the fire, rubbing them furiously. Then he took his coat off and threw it across the room at a chair; it missed the chair and fell to the floor; he didn't pick it up. Then he asked: "Anything to eat?"

Kira stood facing him, silent, motionless in the splendor of her new dress and carefully mended real silk stockings. She said softly: "Yes. Sit down. Everything's ready."

He sat down. He had looked at her several times. He had not noticed. It was the same old blue dress; but she had trimmed it carefully with bands and buttons of black oilcloth which looked almost like patent leather. When she served the millet and he dipped his spoon hungrily into the steaming yellow mush, she stood by the table and, raising her skirt a little, swung her leg forward into the circle of light, watching happily the shimmering, tight silk. She said timidly: "Leo, look."

He looked and asked curtly: "Where did you get them?"

"I . . . Vava gave them to me. They . . . they were torn."

"I wouldn't wear other people's discarded junk."

He did not mention the new dress. She did not call it to his attention. They ate silently.

Marisha had had an abortion. She moaned, behind the closed door. She shuffled heavily across the room, cursing aloud the midwife who did not know her business.

"Citizen Lavrova, will you please clean the bathroom? There's blood all over the floor."

"Leave me alone. I'm sick. Clean it yourself, if you're so damn bourgeois about your bathroom."

Marisha slammed the door, then opened it again, cautiously: "Citizen Argounova, you won't tell your cousin on me, will you? He doesn't know about . . . my trouble. He's—a gentleman."

*

Leo came home at dawn. He had worked all night. He had worked in caissons for a bridge under construction, deep on the bottom of a river on the point of freezing.

Kira had waited for him. She had kept a fire in the "Bourgeoise."

He came in, oil and mud on his coat, oil and sweat on his face, oil and blood on his hands. He swayed a little and held onto the door. A strand of hair was glued across his forehead.

He went into the bathroom. He came out, asking: "Kira, do I have any clean underwear?"

He was naked. His hands were swollen. His head drooped to one shoulder. His eyelids were blue.

His body was white as marble and as hard and straight; the body of a god, she thought, that should climb a mountainside at dawn, young grass under his feet, a morning mist on his muscles in a breath of homage.

The "Bourgeoise" was smoking. An acrid fog hung under the electric bulb. The gray rug under his feet smelt of kerosene. Black drops of soot fell slowly, with a soft thud, from a joint of the stove pipes to the gray rug.

Kira stood before him. She could say nothing. She took his hand and raised it to her lips.

He swayed a little. He threw his head back and coughed.

*

Leo was late. He had been detained at a University lecture. Kira waited, the Primus hissing feebly, keeping his dinner hot.

The telephone rang. She heard a child's voice, trembling, panicky, gulping tears between words: "Is that you, Kira? . . . It's Acia. . . . Kira, please come over immediately, right away. . . . I'm scared. . . . There's something wrong. . . . I think it's mother. . . . There's no one home but father—and he won't call, and he won't speak, and I'm scared. . . . There's nothing to eat in the house. . . . Please, Kira,

I'm so scared. . . . Please come over. Please, Kira. . . ."

With all the money she had, Kira bought a bottle of milk and two pounds of bread in a private store, on her way over.

Acia opened the door. Her eyes were slits in a purple, swollen face. She grabbed Kira's skirt and sobbed dully, convulsively, her shoulders shaking, her nose buried in Kira's hem.

"Acia! What happened? Where's Irina? Where's Victor?"

"Victor's not home. Irina's gone for the doctor. I called a tenant and he said to get the hell out. I'm scared. . . ."

Vasili Ivanovitch sat by his wife's bed. His hands hung limply between his knees and he did not move. Maria Petrovna's hair was spilled over the white pillow. She breathed, hissing, the white coverlet rising and falling jerkily. On the white coverlet there was a wide, dark stain.

Kira stood helplessly, clutching the milk bottle in one hand, the bread in the other. Vasili Ivanovitch raised his head slowly and looked at her.

"Kira . . ." he said indifferently. ". . . Milk. . . . Would you mind heating it? . . . It might help. . . ."

Kira found the Primus. She heated the milk. She held a cup to the trembling blue lips. Maria Petrovna swallowed twice and pushed the cup away.

"Hemorrhage . . ." said Vasili Ivanovitch. "Irina's gone for the doctor. He has no phone. No other doctor will come. I have no money. The hospital won't send anyone—we're not Trade Union members."

A candle burned on the table. Through a sickly, yellow haze, a dusty fog more than a light, three tall, bare, curtainless windows stared like black gashes. A white pitcher lay upturned on a table, slowly dripping a few last drops into a dark puddle on the floor. A yellow circle shivered on the ceiling, over the candle, and a yellow glow shivered on Maria Petrovna's hands, as if her skin were trembling.

Maria Petrovna whined softly: "I'm all right . . . I'm all right . . . I know I'm all right. . . . Vasili just wants to frighten me. . . . No one can say I'm not all right. . . . I want to live . . . I'll live. . . . Who said I won't live?"

"Of course, you will, Aunt Marussia. You're all right. Just lie still. Relax."

"Kira, where's my nail buffer? Find my nail buffer. Irina's lost it again. I told her not to touch it. Where's my nail buffer?"

Kira opened a drawer in search of the buffer. A sound

stopped her. It was like pebbles rolling on a hard floor, like water gurgling through a clogged pipe and like an animal howling. Maria Petrovna was coughing. A dark froth ran down her white chin.

"Ice, Kira!" Vasili Ivanovitch cried. "Have we any ice?"

She ran, stumbling, down a dark corridor, to the kitchen. A thick coating of ice was frozen over the edge of the sink. She broke some off with the sharp, rusty blade of an old knife, cutting her hands. She came back, running, water dripping from the ice between her fingers.

Maria Petrovna howled, coughing: "Help me! Help me! Help me!"

They rolled the ice into a towel and put it on her chest. Red stains spread on her nightgown.

Suddenly she jerked herself up. The ice rolled, clattering, to the floor. A long pink strand of froth hung on her lower lip. Her eyes were wide with a horror beyond all human dignity. She was staring at Kira. She screamed:

"Kira! I want to live! I want to live!"

She fell back. Her hair jerked like snakes on the pillow and lay still. Her arm fell over the edge of the bed and lay still. A red bubble grew over her open mouth and burst in a spurt of something black and heavy, gurgling like the last drop through the clogged pipe. She did not move. Nothing moved on the bed but the black that slithered slowly down the skin of her throat.

Kira stood still.

Someone seized her hand. Vasili Ivanovitch buried his face in her hip and sobbed. He sobbed without a sound. She saw the gray hair shaking on his neck.

Behind a chair in a corner, Acia crouched on the floor and whined softly, monotonously.

Kira did not cry.

When she came home, Leo was sitting by the Primus, heating her dinner. He was coughing.

*

They sat at a small table in a dark corner of the restaurant. Kira had met Andrei at the Institute and he had invited her for a cup of tea with "real French pastry." The restaurant was almost empty. From the sidewalk outside, a few faces stared through the window, dull, incredulous faces watching those who could afford to sit in a restaurant. At a table in the center, a man in a huge fur coat was holding a dish of pastry

for a smiling woman who hesitated in her choice, her fingers fluttering over the glistening chocolate frostings, a diamond glistening on her finger. The restaurant smelt of old rubber and stale fish. A long, sticky paper tube dangled from the central chandelier, brown with glue, black-dotted with dead flies. The tube swayed every time the kitchen door was opened. Over the kitchen door hung a picture of Lenin trimmed with bows of red crêpe paper.

"Kira, I almost broke my word. I was going to call on you. I was worried. I still am. You look so . . . pale. Anything wrong, Kira?"

"Some . . . trouble . . . at home."

"I had tickets for the ballet—'Swans' Lake.' I waited for you, but you missed all your lectures."

"I'm sorry. Was it beautiful?"

"I didn't go."

"Andrei, I think Pavel Syerov is trying to make trouble for you in the Party."

"He probably is. I don't like Pavel Syerov. While the Party is fighting speculators, he patronizes them. He's been known to buy a foreign sweater from a smuggler."

"Andrei, why doesn't your Party believe in the right to live while one is not killed?"

"Do you mean Syerov or—yourself?"

"Myself."

"In our fight, Kira, there is no neutrality."

"You may claim the right to kill, as all fighters do. But no one before you has ever thought of forbidding life to those still living."

She looked at the pitiless face before her; she saw two dark triangles in the sunken cheeks; the muscles of his face were taut. He was saying: "When one can stand any suffering, one can also see others suffer. This is martial law. Our time is dawn. There is a new sun rising, such as the world has never seen before. We are in the path of its first rays. Every pain, every cry of ours will be carried by these rays, as on a gigantic radius, down the centuries; every little figure will grow into an enormous shadow that will wipe out decades of future sorrow for every minute of ours."

The waiter brought the tea and pastry.

There was a convulsive little jerk in Kira's fingers as she raised a piece of pastry to her mouth, an involuntary, frightened hurry which was not mere greed for a rare delicacy.

"Kira!" Andrei gasped and dropped his fork. "Kira!"

She stared at him, frightened.

"Kira! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Andrei . . . I don't know what you're talking ab . . ." she tried to say, but knew what he had guessed.

"Wait! Don't eat that. Waiter! A bowl of hot soup right away. Then—dinner. Everything you have. Hurry! . . . Kira, I didn't know . . . I didn't know it was that bad."

She smiled feebly, helplessly: "I tried to find work. . . ."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I know you don't believe in using Party influence to help friends."

"Oh, but this . . . Kira . . . this!" It was the first time she had ever seen him frightened. He jumped up: "Excuse me a moment."

He strode across the room to a telephone. She could hear splinters of conversation: "Comrade Voronov. Urgent. . . . Andrei Taganov. . . . Conference? Interrupt it! . . . Comrade Voronov? . . . who has to be . . . immediately. . . . Yes . . . I don't care. Make one. . . . Yes. . . . No Nol Tomorrow morning. . . . Yes. Thank you, comrade. Good-bye."

Andrei came back to the table. He smiled down at her startled, incredulous face. "Well, you go to work tomorrow. In the office of the 'House of the Peasant.' It's not very much of a job, but it's one I could get for you right away—and it won't be hard. Be there at nine. Ask for Comrade Voronov. He'll know who you are. And—here." He opened his wallet and, emptying it, pressed a roll of bills into her hand.

"Oh, Andrei! I can't!"

"Well, maybe you can't—for yourself. But you can—for someone else. Isn't there someone at home who needs it—your family?"

She thought of someone at home who needed it. She took the money.

XV.

When Kira slept, her head fell back on the pillow, so faint starlight outside made a white triangle under Her lashes lay still on pale, calm cheeks. Her lips

softly, half open, like a child's, with the hint of a smile in the corners, trusting and expectant, timid and radiantly young.

The alarm clock rang at six-thirty A.M. It had been ringing at six-thirty A.M. for the last two months.

Her first movement of the day was a convulsive leap into an icy precipice. She seized the alarm clock after its first hysterical shriek and turned it off—to let Leo sleep; then stood swaying, shivering, the sound of the alarm still ringing in her ears like an insult, a dark hatred in her body, a cry rising in every muscle like the pain of a great illness, calling her back into bed, her head too heavy for her body, the cold floor like fire under her bare feet.

Then she staggered blindly, groping in the darkness, into the bathroom. Her eyes wouldn't open. She reached for the bathtub faucet; it had been running slowly, gurgling in the darkness, all night; it had to be left running or the pipes would freeze. Eyes closed, she slapped cold water over her face with one hand; with the other, she leaned unsteadily on the edge of the bathtub, to keep from falling forward head first.

Then her eyes opened and she pulled her nightgown off, steam rising from her wet arms in the frozen air, while she tried to smile, her teeth chattering, telling herself that she was awake now and the worst was over.

She dressed and slipped back into the bedroom. She did not turn on the light. She could see the black silhouette of the Primus on the table against the dark blue of the window. She struck a match, her body shielding the bed from the little flare of light. She pumped the handle nervously. The Primus wouldn't light. The clock ticked in the darkness, the precious fleeting seconds hurrying her on. She pumped furiously, biting her lips. The blue flame sprang up at last. She put a pan of water over the flame.

She drank tea with saccharine and chewed slowly a piece of dry bread. The window before her was frozen into a solid pattern of white ferns that sparkled softly; beyond the window it was still night. She sat huddled by the table, afraid to move, trying to chew without a sound. Leo slept restlessly. He turned uneasily; he coughed, a dry, choking cough smothered by the pillow; he sighed once in a while in his sleep, a raucous sigh that was almost a moan.

She pulled on her felt boots, her winter coat, wound an old scarf around her throat. She tiptoed to the door, threw a last glance at the pale blur in the darkness that was Leo's face, and brushed her lips with her finger tips in a soundless kiss. Then

she opened the door very slowly and as slowly closed it again behind her.

The snow was still blue outside. Above the roofs, the blue darkness receded in circles, so that far away down the sky one could guess a paler blue if one looked hard. Somewhere beyond the houses, a tramway shrieked like an early bird of prey.

Kira bent forward, gathered her hands into her armpits, in a tight, shivering huddle against the wind. The cold caught her breath with a sharp pain in her nostrils. She ran, slipping on the frozen sidewalks, toward the distant tramway.

A line waited for the tramway. She stood, bent to the wind and silent as the others. When the tramway came, yellow squares of light in space, shaking toward them through the darkness, the line broke. There was a swift whirlpool at the narrow door, a rustle of crushed bodies; the yellow squares of lighted windows filled speedily with shadows pressed tightly together, and Kira was left outside as the bell rang and the tramway tore forward. There was half an hour to wait for the next one; she would be late; if she were late, she would be fired; she ran after the tramway, leaped, caught a brass handle; but there was no room on the steps; her feet were dragged down the frozen ground as the tramway gained speed; someone's strong arm seized her shoulder blade and pulled her up; her one foot found space on the steps; a hoarse voice roared into her ear: "You—insane, citizen? That's how so many get killed!"

She hung in a cluster of men on the tramway steps, holding on with one hand and one foot, watching the streaked snow speed by on the ground, pressing herself with all her strength into the cluster of bodies, when a passing truck came too close and threatened to grind her off the tramway steps.

The "House of the Peasant" occupied someone's former mansion. It had a stairway of pale pink marble with a bronze balustrade, lighted by a huge stained-glass window where purple grapes and pink peaches rolled out of golden cornucopias. A sign was posted over the stairs: COMRADES! DO NOT SPIT ON THE FLOOR.

There were other signs: a huge sickle and hammer of gilded papier-mâché, a poster with a peasant woman and a sheaf of wheat, more posters of sheafs, golden sheafs, green sheafs, red sheafs, a picture of Lenin, a peasant grinding under foot a spider with the head of a priest, a picture of Trotzky, a peasant and a red tractor, a picture of Karl Marx, "Proletarians of the World, Unite!" "Who does not toil, shall not eat!"

Long live the reign of workers and poor peasants!" "Comrade peasants, crush the hoarders in your midst!"

A new movement had been started in a blare of newspapers and posters for "a closer understanding between workers and peasants, a wider spread of city ideas through the country," a movement called "The Clamping of City and Village." The "House of the Peasant" was dedicated to such clamping. There were posters of workers and peasants shaking hands, of a worker and a peasant woman, also of a peasant and a working woman, of work bench and plow, of smokestacks and wheat fields, "Our future lies in the Clamping of City and Village!," "Comrades, strengthen the Clamping!," "Comrades, do your share for the Clamping!," "Comrades, what have you done for the Clamping?"

The posters rose like foam from the entrance door, up the stairway, to the office. In the office there were carved marble columns and partitions of unpainted wood; also—desks, files, pictures of proletarian leaders and a typewriter; also—Comrade Bitiuk, the office manager, and five office workers, among them Kira Argounova.

Comrade Bitiuk was a tall woman, thin, gray-haired, military and in strict sympathy with the Soviet Government; her chief aim in life was to give constant evidence of how strict that sympathy was, even though she had graduated from a women's college and wore on her breast an old-fashioned watch on a bow of burnished silver.

Her four office workers were: a tall girl with a long nose and a leather jacket, who was a Party member and could make Comrade Bitiuk shudder at her slightest whim, and knew it; a young man with a bad complexion, who was not a Party member yet, but had made an application and was a candidate, and never missed a chance to mention it; and two young girls who worked merely because they needed the wages: Nina and Tina. Nina wore earrings and answered the telephone; Tina powdered her nose and ran the typewriter. A habit which had sprung from nowhere and spread over the country, which even Party members could not check or resist, for which no one was responsible nor could be punished, referred to all products of local inefficiency as "Soviet"; there were "Soviet matches" that did not light, "Soviet kerechiefs" that tore the first time worn, "Soviet shoes" with cardboard soles. Young women like Nina and Tina were called "Soviet girls."

There were many floors and many offices in the "House of the Peasant." Many feet hurried up and down its many cor-

ridors in a steady drone of activity. Kira never learned just what that activity was, nor who worked in the building, besides those in her office and the imposing Comrade Voronov whom she had seen once on her first day in the "House of the Peasant."

As Comrade Bitiuk reminded them constantly, the "House of the Peasant" was "the heart of a gigantic net whose veins poured the beneficial light of the new Proletarian Culture into the darkest corners of our farthest villages." It represented the hospitable arms of the city open wide in welcome to all peasant delegations, all comrades from the villages who came to the city. It stood there as their guide and teacher, as the devoted servant of their cultural and spiritual needs.

From her desk, Kira watched Comrade Bitiuk gushing into the telephone: "Yes, yes, comrade, it's all arranged. At one o'clock the comrade peasants of the Siberian delegation go to the Museum of the Revolution—the history of our Revolutionary movement from its first days—an easy, visualized course in Proletarian history—within two hours—very valuable—and we have made arrangements for a special guide. At three o'clock the comrade peasants go to our Marxist Club where we have arranged a special lecture on the 'Problems of the Soviet City and Village.' At five o'clock the comrade peasants are expected at a club of the Pioneers where the children have called a special meeting in their honor—there will be a display of physical culture drills by the dear little tots. At seven o'clock the comrade peasants go to the opera—we have reserved two boxes at the Marinsky Theater—where they will hear 'Aïda.' "

When Comrade Bitiuk hung up the receiver, she whirled around in her chair, snapping a military command: "Comrade Argounoval Do you have the requisition for the special lecturer?"

"No, Comrade Bitiuk."

"Comrade Ivanova! Have you typed that requisition?"

"What requisition, Comrade Bit . . . ?"

"The requisition for the special lecturer for the delegation of the comrade peasants from Siberia!"

"But you didn't tell me to type any requisitions, Comrade Bitiu . . ."

"I wrote it myself and put it on your desk."

"Oh, yes, sure, oh, that's what it was for? Oh, well, I saw it, but I didn't know I was to type it, Comrade Bitiuk. And my typewriter ribbon is torn."

"Comrade Argounova, do you have the approved requisition for a new typewriter ribbon for Comrade Ivanova's typewriter?"

"No, Comrade Bitiuk."

"Where is it?"

"In Comrade Voronov's office."

"What is it doing there?"

"Comrade Voronov hasn't signed it yet."

"Have the others signed?"

"Yes, Comrade Bitiuk. Comrade Semenov has signed it, and Comrade Vlassova, and Comrade Pereverstov. But Comrade Voronov has not returned it yet."

"Some people do not realize the tremendous cultural importance of the work we're doing!" Comrade Bitiuk raged, but noticing the cold, suspicious stare of the girl in the leather jacket, who heard this criticism of a higher official, she hastened to correct herself. "I meant you, Comrade Argounova. You do not show sufficient interest in your work nor any proletarian consciousness. It's up to you to see that this requisition is signed."

"Yes, Comrade Bitiuk."

Through the hours, thin and pale in her faded dress, Kira filed documents, typewritten documents, certificates, reports, accounts, requisitions that had to be filed where no one ever looked at them again; she counted books, columns of books, mountains of books, fresh from the printers, ink staining her fingers, books in red and white paper covers to be sent to Peasant Clubs all over the country: "What you can do for the Clamping," "The Red Peasant," "The work-bench and the plow," "The ABC of Communism," "Comrade Lenin and Comrade Marx." There were many telephone calls; there were many people coming in and going out, to be called "comrades" and "citizens"; there were many times to repeat mechanically, like a well-wound gramophone, imitating Comrade Bitiuk's enthusiastic inflations: "Thus, comrade, you will be doing your share for the Clamping," and "The cultural progress of the Proletariat, comrade, requires that . . ."

Sometimes a comrade peasant came into the office in person. He stood behind the low, unpainted partition, timidly crumpling his fur cap in one hand, scratching his head with the other. He nodded slowly, his bewildered eyes staring at Kira without comprehension, as she told him: ". . . and we have arranged an excursion for the comrades of your delegation through the Winter Palace where you can see how the

Czar lived—an easy, visualized lesson in class tyranny—and then . . .”

The peasant mumbled in his blond beard: “Now, about that grain shortage matter, comrade. . . .”

“Then, after the excursion, we have a special lecture arranged for you on ‘The Doom of Capitalism.’”

When the comrade peasant left, Nina or Tina snooped cautiously around the place where he had stood, inspecting the wooden railing. Once, Kira saw Nina cracking something on her thumb nail.

This morning, on her way up to the office, Kira stopped on the stair landing and looked at the Wall Newspaper. The “House of the Peasant,” like all institutions, had a Wall Newspaper written by the employees, edited by the local Communist Cell, pasted in a prominent spot for all comrades to read; the Wall Newspapers were to “stimulate the social spirit and the consciousness of collective activity”; they were devoted to “local news of social importance and constructive proletarian criticism.”

The Wall Newspaper of the “House of the Peasant” was a square meter of typewritten strips pasted on a blackboard with headlines in red and blue pencil. There was a prominent editorial on “What each one of us comrades here does for the Clamping,” there was a humorous article on “How we’ll puncture the foreign Imperialist’s belly,” there was a poem by a local poet about “The Rhythm of Toil,” there was a cartoon by a local artist, representing a fat man in a high silk hat sitting on a toilet. There were many items of constructive proletarian criticism:

“Comrade Nadia Chernova is wearing silk stockings. Time to be reminded that such flaunting of luxury is un-proletarian, Comrade Chernova.”

“A certain comrade in a high position has lately allowed his position to go to his head. He has been known to be curt and rude to young members of the Komsomol. This is a warning, comrade * * * Many a better head has been known to fall when the time came for a reduction of staffs.”

“Comrade E. Ovsov indulges in too much talk when asked about business. This leads to a waste of valuable time and is not at all in the spirit of proletarian efficiency.”

“A certain comrade whom many will recognize, neglects to turn off the light when leaving the rest-room. Electricity costs money to the Soviet State, comrade.”

“We hear that Comrade Kira Argounov: is taking a special interest in the matter of the light switch.”

spirit. The time is past, Comrade Argounova, for arrogant bourgeois attitudes."

She stood very still and heard her heart beating. No one dared to ignore the mighty pointing finger of the Wall Newspaper. All watched it carefully and a little nervously, all bowed reverently to its verdict, from Nina and Tina up to Comrade Voronov himself. The Wall Newspaper was the voice of Social Activity. No one could save those branded as "anti-social element," not even Andrei Taganov. There had been talk of a reduction of staffs. Kira felt cold. She thought that Leo had had nothing but millet for dinner the night before. She thought of Leo's cough.

At her desk, she watched the others in the room, wondering who had reported her to the Wall Newspaper, who and why. She had been so very careful. She had never uttered a word of criticism against the Soviets. She had been as loyally enthusiastic in her work as Comrade Bitiuk herself, or as nearly as she could imitate her. She had been careful never to argue, nor to answer sharply, nor to make an enemy of anyone. Her fingers counting rapidly volumes of the works of Karl Marx, she asked herself helplessly, desperately: "Am I still different? Am I different from them? How do they know I'm different? What have I done? What is it I haven't done?"

When Comrade Bitiuk left the office, which happened frequently, work stopped. The staff congregated around Tina's typewriter. There were eager whispered conferences about the co-operative that gave the loveliest printed calico that made the loveliest blouses, about the Nepman's stand in the market that sold cotton stockings "so thin it's just like silk," and about lovers, particularly Tina's lovers. Tina was considered the prettiest in the office, and the most successful with men. No one had ever seen her little nose without its whitish coat of powder; there was a strong suspicion in the office that she blackened her eyelashes; and several different masculine figures had been seen waiting to take her home after work. The girl with the leather jacket, being a Party member, was the undisputed leader and final authority in all their discussions; but in matters of romance, she conceded first rank to Tina. She listened with a superior, condescending smile that did not hide her eager curiosity, while Tina whispered breathlessly:

"... And Mishka rang the bell and here was Ivashka in his underdrawers and I hear Elena Maximovna—that's the tenant in the next room—I hear Elena Maximovna say: 'A guest for you, Tina,' and before I know it, here's Mishka walking

right in and Ivashka in his underdrawers—and you should've seen Mishka's face, honest, it was better than a comedy show—and I think quick and I say: 'Mishka dear, this is Ivan, the neighbor, he lives with Elena Maximovna and he wasn't feeling well, so he came in for an aspirin tablet,' and you should've seen Ivashka's face, and Elena Maximovna she says: 'Sure, he lives with me. Come on back to my room, darling.' And do you think that louse Ivashka refused?"

The young man who was a Party candidate did not join these conversations, but stayed modestly at his desk, listening intently and remarking once in a while: "You comrades women! I bet you say things that a serious citizen who is a Party candidate shouldn't even hear."

They giggled, flattered, and rewarded him with friendly glances.

Kira stayed at her desk and went on with her work, and did not listen. She never talked to anyone outside of business matters. If any glances were thrown at her occasionally, they were not friendly.

She wondered with a cold feeling of panic whether that was what they resented, whether that was her arrogant bourgeois attitude. She needed this job. Leo needed this job. She had made up her mind to keep it. She would keep it.

She rose and walked casually to Tina's desk. The little group noticed her presence by a few cold, astonished glances and went on with their whispers.

She waited for a pause and said suddenly, irrelevantly, forcing all of the artificial enthusiasm she had learned into her flat, unsteady voice: "Funny thing happened last night. My boy friend—he quarreled with me because . . . because he had seen me coming home with another man . . . and he . . . he bawled me out terribly . . . and I told him it was an old-fashioned bourgeois attitude of proprietorship, but he . . . well . . . he quarreled with me. . . ."

She felt her blouse sticking to the cold spot between her shoulder blades. She tried to make her voice as gaily flippant as Tina's. She tried to believe the story she was inventing; it was strange to think of the fantastic boy friend offered to those prying, hostile eyes, and of the Leo whom Irina had drawn naked as a god.

". . . and he bawled me out terribly. . . ."

"Uh-huh," said Nina.

The girl in the leather jacket said not!

"In the Kouznetzky market," said Tina.

ing lipstick, the new Soviet lipstick of the Cosmetic Trust. Cheap, too. Only they say it's dangerous to use it. It's made from horse fat and the horses died of glanders."

*

At twelve-thirty the office closed for lunch. At twelve-twenty-five, Comrade Bitiuk said: "I shall remind you once more, comrades, that at one-thirty, instead of reporting back to the office, you are to report at the Smolny Institute to take part in the demonstration of all the workers of Petrograd in honor of the delegation of the British Trade Unions. The office will be closed this afternoon."

Kira spent her lunch hour standing in line at the co-operative to get bread on her employee's ration card. She stood motionless, in a blank stupor; a movement or a thought seemed too far away, far in a world where she did not belong any longer. The locks of hair under her old hat were white with frost. She thought that somewhere beyond all these many things which did not count, was her life and Leo. She closed her eyes for one swift second of rest with nothing but his name. Then she opened her eyes and watched dully, through lids heavy with white-frosted lashes, puffy sparrows picking horse dung in the snow.

She had brought her lunch with her—a piece of dried fish wrapped in paper. She ate it, because she knew she had to eat. When she got the bread—a two-pound brown square that was still fresh—she smelled its comforting, warm odor and chewed slowly a piece of crust; the rest, tucked firmly under her arm, was for Leo.

She ran after a tramway and leaped on just in time for the long ride to the Smolny Institute at the other end of the city, for the demonstration of all the workers of Petrograd in honor of the delegation of the British Trade Unions.

*

Nevsky looked as if it were a solid spread of heads motionless on a huge belt that rolled slowly, carrying them forward. It looked as if red banners, swollen like sails between two poles, were swimming slowly over motionless heads, the same heads of khaki caps, fur caps, red kerchiefs, hats, khaki caps, red kerchiefs. A dull beating filled the street from wall to wall, up to the roofs, the crunching, creaking, drumming roll of many feet against frozen cobblestones.

Tramways stopped and trucks waited on corners to let the

demonstration pass. A few heads appeared at windows, stared indifferently at the heads below and disappeared again: Petrograd was used to demonstrations.

WE, TOILERS OF PETROGRAD, GREET OUR BRITISH CLASS BROTHERS! WELCOME TO THE LAND OF THE SOVIETS WHERE LABOR IS
FREE!

THE WOMEN OF THE STATE TEXTILE PLANT NUMBER 2 PLEDGE
THEIR SUPPORT TO ENGLAND'S PROLETARIAT IN ITS STRUGGLE
WITH IMPERIALISTS

Kira marched between Nina and Comrade Bitiuk. Comrade Bitiuk had changed her hat to a red kerchief for the occasion. Kira marched steadily, shoulders thrown back, head high. She had to march here to keep her job; she had to keep her job for Leo; she was not a traitor, she was marching for Leo—even though the banner above her, carried by Tina and the Party candidates, said:

WE, SOVIET PEASANTS, STAND AS ONE FOR OUR BRITISH
CLASS BROTHERS!

Kira could not feel her feet any longer; but she knew that she was walking, for she was moving ahead like the others. Her hands felt as if her mittens were filled with boiling water. She had to walk. She was walking.

Somewhere in the long snake that uncoiled slowly down Nevsky, someone's hoarse, loud voice began to sing the "Internationale." Others joined. It rolled in raucous, discordant waves down the long column of weary throats choked by frost.

On the Palace Square, now called Square of Uritzki, a wooden amphitheater had been erected. Against the red walls and mirror-like windows of the Winter Palace, on the wooden stand draped in red bunting, stood the delegation of the British Trade Unions. The workers of Petrograd slowly marched past. The British class brothers stood, a little stiff, a little embarrassed, a little bewildered.

Kira's eyes saw but one person: the woman delegate of the British Trade Unions. She was tall, thin, not young, with the worried face of a school teacher. But she wore a tan sports coat and that coat yelled louder than the hurrahs of the crowd, louder than the "Internationale," that it was *foreign*. With firm, pressed folds of rich material, trim, well-fitted, serene,

that coat did not moan, like all those others around Kira, of the misery of the muscles underneath. The British comrade wore silk stockings; a rich, brownish sheen, tight on feet in trim, new, well-polished brown shoes.

And suddenly Kira wanted to scream and to hurl herself at the stand, and to grab these thin, glittering legs and hang on with her teeth as to an anchor, and be carried away with them into their world which was possible somewhere, which was now here, close, within hearing of a cry for help.

But she only swayed a little and closed her eyes.

The demonstration stopped. It stood, knocking heels together to keep warm, listening to speeches. There were many speeches. The comrade woman of the British Trade Unions spoke. A hoarse interpreter bellowed her words into the Square red and khaki with heads packed tightly together.

"This is a thrilling sight. We were sent here by England's workers to see for ourselves and to tell the world the truth about the great experiment you are conducting. We shall tell them that we saw the great masses of Russian toilers in a free and magnificent expression of loyalty to the Soviet Government."

For one insane second, Kira wondered if she could tear through the crowd, rush up to that woman and yell to her, to England's workers, to the world, the truth they were seeking. But she thought of Leo at home, marble pale, coughing. It was Leo against the truth to a world which would not listen. Leo won.

At five P.M. a glittering limousine whisked the delegates away and the demonstration broke up. It was growing dark. Kira had time for a lecture at the Institute.

The cold, badly lighted auditoriums were a tonic to her, with the charts, drafts and prints on the walls, showing beams and girders and cross sections that looked precise, impersonal and unsullied. For a short hour, even though her stomach throbbed with hunger, she could remember that she was to be a builder who would build aluminum bridges and towers of steel and glass; and that there was a future.

After the lecture, hurrying out through dim corridors, she met Comrade Sonia.

"Ah, Comrade Argounova," said Comrade Sonia. "We haven't seen you for a long time. Not so active in your studies

any more, are you? And as to social activity—why, you're the most privately individualistic student we've got."

"I . . ." Kira began.

"None of my business, Comrade Argounova, I know, none of my business. I was just thinking of things one hears nowadays about things the Party may do about students who are not social-minded. Don't give it a thought."

"I . . . you see . . ." Kira knew it wiser to explain. "I'm working and I'm very active socially in our Marxist Club."

"So? You are, are you? We know you bourgeois. All you're active for is to keep your measly jobs. You're not fooling anyone."

*

When Kira entered the room, Marisha jumped up like a spring unwinding: "Citizen Argounova! You keep your damn cat in your own room or I'll wring her neck!"

"My cat? What cat? I have no cat."

"Well, who's done this? Your boy friend?" Marisha was pointing at a puddle in the middle of her room. "And what's that? An elephant?" She raged as a meow and a pair of gray, furry ears emerged from under a chair.

"It's not my cat," said Kira.

"Where's she come from, then?"

"How do I know?"

"You never know anything!"

Kira did not answer and went to her room. She heard Marisha in the little hall off the lobby, pounding at the partition that separated them from the other tenants. She heard her yelling: "Hey, you there! Your God-damn cat's torn a board loose and here she is, crapping all over the place! You take her away or I'll gut her alive and report you to the Upravdom!"

Leo was not at home. The room was dark, cold as a cellar. Kira switched on the light. The bed was not made; the blanket was on the floor. She lighted the "Bourgeoise," blowing at the damp logs, her eyes swelling. The pipes were leaking. She hung a tin can on a wire to catch the dripping soot.

She pumped the Primus. It would not light; its tubes were clogged again. She searched all over the room for the special wire cleaner. She could not find it. She knocked at the door.

"Citizen Lavrova, have you taken my Primus cleaner again?" There was no answer. She flung the door open. "Citizen Lavrova, have you taken my Primus cleaner?"

"Aw, hell," said Marisha. "Stingy, aren't you, of a little Primus cleaner? Here it is."

"How many times do I have to ask you, Citizen Lavrova, not to touch any of my things in my absence?"

"What are you gonna do about it? Report me?"

Kira took the Primus cleaner and slammed the door.

She was peeling potatoes when Leo came in.

"Oh," he said, "you're home?"

"Yes. Where have you been, Leo?"

"Any of your business?"

She did not answer. His shoulders were drooping and his lips were blue. She knew where he had been; and that he had not succeeded.

She went on peeling the potatoes. He stood with his hands extended to the "Bourgeoise," his lips twisted with pain. He coughed. Then he turned abruptly and said: "Same thing. You know. Since eight this morning. No opening. No job. No work."

"It's all right, Leo. We don't have to worry."

"No? We don't, do we? You're enjoying it, aren't you, to see me living off you? You're glad to remind me that I don't have to worry while you're working yourself into a scarecrow of a martyr?"

"Leo!"

"Well, I don't want to see you work! I don't want to see you cook! I don't . . . Oh, Kira!" He seized her and put his head on her shoulder, and buried his face in her neck, over the blue flame of the Primus. "Kira, you forgive me, don't you?"

She patted his hair with her cheek, for her hands were sticky with potato peelings. "Of course. . . . Dearest. . . . Why don't you lie down and rest? Dinner will be ready in just a little while."

"Why don't you let me help you?"

"Now there's an argument that we've closed long ago."

He bent down to her, lifting her chin. She whispered, shuddering a little: "Don't, Leo. Don't kiss me—here." She held out her dirty hands over the Primus.

He did not kiss her. A bitter little smile of understanding jerked one corner of his mouth. He walked to the bed and fell down.

He lay so still, his head thrown back, one arm hanging to the floor, that she felt uncomfortable. Once in a while, she called softly: "Leo," just to see him open his eyes. Then she

wished she hadn't called: she did not want his eyes to stay open, watching her fixedly. She—who had so carefully closed the door between them so that he might not see her as she did not want to be seen—she stood before him now, bent over a Primus, in an aura of kerosene and onion smell, her hands slimy with raw mud, her hair hanging down in sticky strands over a nose shiny without powder, her eyes and nostrils red on a white face, her body sagging limply under a filthy apron she had no time to wash, her movements heavy and slurred, not the sharp play of muscles, but the slothful fall of limbs pushed by a weariness beyond control.

And when dinner was ready and they sat facing each other across the table, she thought with a pain which would not become a habit, that he—whom she wanted to face, looking young, erect, vibrant with all of her worship—he now looked into eyes swollen with smoke and at a pale mouth that smiled an effort she could not hide.

They had millet, potatoes, and onions fried in linseed oil. She was so hungry that her arms were limp. But she could not touch the millet. She felt suddenly an uncontrollable revulsion, a hatred that could let her starve rather than swallow one more spoonful of the bitter stuff she had eaten, it seemed, all her life. She wondered dully whether there was a place on earth where one could eat without being sick of every mouthful; a place where eggs and butter and sugar were not a sublime ideal longed for agonizingly, never attained.

She washed the dishes in cold water, grease floating over the pan. Then she pulled on her felt boots. "I have to go out, Leo," she said with resignation. "It's the Marxist Club night. Social activity, you know."

He did not answer; he did not look at her as she went out.

*

The Marxist Club held its sessions in the library of the "House of the Peasant." The library was like all the other rooms in the building except that it had more posters and fewer books; and the books were lined on shelves, instead of being stacked in tall columns ready for shipping.

The girl in the leather jacket was chairman of the Club; the employees of the "House of the Peasant" were members. The Club was dedicated to "political self-education" and the study of "historical revolutionary philosophy"; twice a

week; one member read a thesis he had prepared, the others discussed it.

It was Kira's turn. She read her thesis on "Marxism and Leninism."

"Leninism is Marxism adapted to Russian reality. Karl Marx, the great founder of Communism, believed that Socialism was to be the logical outcome of Capitalism in a country of highly developed Industrialism and with a proletariat attuned to a high degree of class-consciousness. But our great leader, Comrade Lenin, proved that . . ."

She had copied her thesis, barely changing the words, from the "ABC of Communism," a book whose study was compulsory in every school in the country. She knew that all her listeners had read it, that they had also read her thesis, time and time again, in every editorial of every newspaper for the last six years. They sat around her, hunched, legs stretched out limply, shivering in their overcoats. They knew she was there for the same reason they were. The girl in the leather jacket presided, yawning once in a while.

When Kira finished, a few hands clapped drowsily.

"Who desires to make comments, comrades?" the chairman inquired.

A young girl with a very round face and forlorn eyes, said lisping, showing eagerly her active interest: "I think it was a very nice thesis, and very valuable and instructive, because it was very nice and clear and explained a valuable new theory."

A consumptive and intellectual young man with blue eyelids and a pince-nez, said in the professional manner of a scientist: "I would make the following criticism, Comrade Argounova: when you speak of the fact that Comrade Lenin allowed a place for the peasant beside the industrial worker in the scheme of Communism, you should specify that it is a *poor* peasant, not just any kind of a peasant, because it is well known that there are rich peasants in the villages, who are hostile to Leninism."

Kira knew that she had to argue and defend her thesis; she knew that the consumptive young man had to argue to show his activity; she knew that he was no more interested in the discussion than she was, that his blue eyelids were weary with sleeplessness, that he clasped his thin hands nervously, not daring to glance at his wristwatch, not daring to let his thoughts wander to the home and its cares that awaited him somewhere.

She said dully: "When I mention the peasant beside the

worker in Comrade Lenin's theory, it is to be taken for granted that I mean the poor peasant, as no other has a place in Communism."

The young man said drowsily: "Yes, but I think we should be scientifically methodical and say: *poor peasant*."

The chairman said: "I agree with the last speaker. The thesis should be corrected to read: *poor peasant*. Any other comments, comrades?"

There were none.

"We shall thank Comrade Argounova for her valuable work," said the chairman. "Our next meeting will be devoted to a thesis by Comrade Leskov on 'Marxism and Collectivism.' I now declare this meeting closed."

With a convulsive jerk and a clatter of chairs, they rushed out of the library, down the dark stairs, into the dark streets. They had done their duty. The evening—or what was left of it—belonged to them now.

Kira walked fast and listened to her own footsteps, listened blankly, without thought; she could think now, but after so many hours of such a tremendous effort not to think, not to think, to remember only not to think, thoughts seemed slow to return; she knew only that her steps were beating, fast, firm, precise, until their strength and their hope rose to her body, to her heart, to the throbbing haze in her temples. She threw her head back, as if she were resting, swimming on her back, close under a clear black sky, with stars at the tip of her nose, and roof tops with snow clean in the frozen starlight like white virgin mountain peaks.

Then she swung forward with the sharp, light movements of Kira Argounova's body and she whispered to herself, as she had talked to herself often in the last two months: "Well, it's war. It's war. You don't give up, do you, Kira? It's not dangerous so long as you don't give up. You're a soldier, Kira, and you don't give up. And the harder it gets the happier you should be that you can stand it. That's it. The harder—the happier. It's war. You're a good soldier, Kira Argounova."

*

When Leo put his arms around her and whispered into her hair: "Oh, yes, yes, Kira. Tonight. Please!" she knew that she could not refuse any longer. Her body, suddenly limp again, cried for nothing but sleep, an endless sleep. It horrified her, that reluctant surrender, numb, lifeless, without response.

He held her body close to his, and ~~the skin was~~ under

the cold blanket. His skin was warm, and soothing, and she closed her eyes.

"What's the matter, Kira?"

She smiled and forced all of her last strength into her lips in the hollow of his collar bone, into her arms locked around his body. Her arms relaxed and one hand slipped, soft and weak, over the edge of the bed. She jerked her eyes open, she loved him, she wanted him, she wanted to want him—she screamed to herself almost aloud. He was kissing her body, but she was thinking of what they thought of her thesis, of Tina and the girl in the leather jacket, of the probable reduction of staffs—and suddenly she was seized with revulsion for his soft, hungry lips, because something in her, or of her, or around her was too unworthy of him. But she could keep awake a little while longer and she stiffened her body as for an ordeal, all her thoughts of love reduced to a tortured hurry to get it over with.

*

It was past midnight and she did not know whether she had been asleep or not. Leo breathed painfully on the pillow beside her, his forehead clammy with cold perspiration. In the haze of her mind, one thought stood out clearly: the pron. That apron of hers was filthy; it was loathsome; she would not let Leo see her wearing it another day; not another day.

She crawled out of bed and slipped her coat over her nightgown; it was too cold and she was too tired to dress. She put the pan of cold water on the bathroom floor, and fell down by its side and crammed the apron, the soap and her hands into a liquid that felt like acid.

She did not know whether she was quite awake and she did not care. She knew only that the big yellow grease spot wouldn't come off, and she rubbed, and she rubbed, and she rubbed, with the dry, acrid, yellow soap, with her nails, with her knuckles, soap suds on the fur cuffs of her coat, huddled on the floor, her breasts panting against the tin edge of the pan, her hair falling down, down into the suds; beyond the narrow crack of the bathroom door a tall blue window sparkling with frost, her knuckles raw, the skin rubbed off, beyond the bedroom door someone in Marisha's room playing "John Gray" on a piano with a missing key, the pain growing in her knuckles, in her eyes, in her knees, across her back, the soap suds brown and greasy over purple hands.

They saved the money for many months and on a Sunday evening they bought two tickets to see "Bajadere," advertised as the "latest sensation of Vienna, Berlin and Paris."

They sat, solemn, erect, reverent as at a church service, Kira a little paler than usual in her gray silk dress, Leo trying not to cough, and they listened to the wantonest operetta from over there, from *abroad*.

It was very gay nonsense. It was like a glance straight through the snow and the flags, through the border, into the heart of that other world. There were colored lights, and spangles, and crystal goblets, and a real foreign bar with a dull glass archway where a green light moved slowly upward, preceding every entrance—a real foreign elevator. There were women in shimmering satin from a place where fashions existed, and people dancing a funny foreign dance called "Shimmy," and a woman who did not sing, but barked words out, spitting them contemptuously at the audience, in a flat, hoarse voice that trailed suddenly into a husky moan—and a music that laughed defiantly, panting, gasping, hitting one's ears and throat and breath, an impudent, drunken music, like the challenge of a triumphant gaiety, like the "Song of Broken Glass," a promise that existed somewhere, that was, that could be.

The public laughed, and applauded, and laughed. When the lights went on after the final curtain, in the procession of cheerful grins down the aisles many noticed with astonishment a girl in a gray silk dress, who sat in an emptying row, bent over, her face in her hands, sobbing.

XVI

At first there were whispers.

Students gathered in groups in dark corners and jerked their heads nervously at every approaching newcomer, and in their whispers one heard the words: "The Purge."

In lines at co-operatives and in tramways people asked: "Have you heard about the Purge?"

In the columns of *Pravda* there appeared many mentions

of the deplorable state of Red colleges and of the coming Purge.

And then, at the end of the winter semester, in the Technological Institute, in the University and in all the institutions of higher education, there appeared a large notice with huge letters in red pencil:

THE PURGE

The notice directed all students to call at the office, receive questionnaires, fill them out promptly, have their Upravdom certify to the truth of the answers and return them to the Purging Committee. The schools of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics were to be cleaned of all socially undesirable persons. Those found socially undesirable were to be expelled, never to be admitted to any college again.

Newspapers roared over the country like trumpets: "Science is a weapon of the class struggle! Proletarian schools are for the Proletariat! We shall not educate our class enemies!"

There were those who were careful not to let these trumpets be heard too loudly across the border.

Kira received her questionnaire at the Institute, and Leo—his at the University. They sat silently at their dinner table, filling out the answers. They did not eat much dinner that night. When they signed the questionnaires, they knew they had signed the death warrant of their future; but they did not say it aloud and they did not look at each other.

The main questions were:

Who were your parents?

What was your father's occupation prior to the year 1917?

What was your father's occupation from the year 1917 to the year 1921?

What is your father's occupation now?

What is your mother's occupation?

What did you do during the civil war?

What did your father do during the civil war?

Are you a Trade Union member?

Are you a member of the All-Union Communist Party?

Any attempt to give a false answer was futile; the answers were to be investigated by the Purging Committee and the

G.P.U. A false answer was to be punished by arrest, imprisonment or any penalty up to the supreme one.

Kira's hand trembled a little when she handed to the Purge Committee the questionnaire that bore the answer:

What was your father's occupation prior to the year 1917?

Owner of the Argounov Textile Factory.

What awaited those who were to be expelled, no one dared to think; no one mentioned it; the questionnaires were turned in and the students waited for a call from the committee, waited silently, nerves tense as wires. In the long corridors of the colleges, where the troubled stream of students clotted into restless clusters, they whispered that one's "social origin" was most important—that if you were of "bourgeois descent," you didn't have a chance—that if your parents had been wealthy, you were still a "class enemy," even though you were starving—and that you must try, if you could, at the price of your immortal soul, if you had one, to prove your "origin from the work-bench or the plough." There were more leather jackets, and red kerchiefs, and sunflower-seed shells in the college corridors, and jokes about: "My parents? Why, they were a peasant woman and two workers."

It was spring again, and melting snow drilled the sidewalks, and blue hyacinths were sold on street corners. But those who were young had no thought left for spring and those who still thought were not young any longer.

Kira Argounova, head high, stood before the Purge Committee of the Technological Institute. At the table, among the men of the committee whom she did not know, sat three persons she knew: Comrade Sonia, Pavel Syerov, Andrei Taganov.

It was Pavel Syerov who did most of the questioning. Her questionnaire lay on the table before him. "So, Citizen Argounova, your father was a factory owner?"

"Yes."

"I see. And your mother? Did she work before the revolution?"

"No."

"I see. Did you employ servants in your home?"

"Yes."

"I see."

Comrade Sonia asked: "And you've never joined a Trade Union, Citizen Argounova? Didn't find it desirable?"

"I have never had the opportunity."

"I see."

Andrei Taganov listened. His face did not move. His eyes were cold, steady, impersonal, as if he had never seen Kira before. And suddenly she felt an inexplicable pity for him, for that immobility and what it hid, although he showed not the slightest sign of what it hid.

But when he asked her a question suddenly, even though his voice was hard and his eyes empty, the question was a plea: "But you've always been in strict sympathy with the Soviet Government, Citizen Argounova, haven't you?"

She answered very softly: "Yes."

*

Somewhere, around a lamp, late in the night, amid rustling papers, reports and documents, a committee was holding a conference.

"Factory owners were the chief exploiters of the Proletariat."

"Worse than landowners."

"Most dangerous of class enemies."

"We are performing a great service to the cause of the Revolution and no personal feelings are to interfere with our duty."

"Order from Moscow—children of former factory owners are in the first category to be expelled."

A voice asked, weighing every word: "Any exceptions to that rule, Comrade Taganov?"

He stood by a window, his hands clasped behind his back. He answered: "None."

*

The names of those expelled were typewritten on a long sheet of paper and posted on a blackboard in the office of the Technological Institute.

Kira had expected it. But when she saw the name on the list: "*Argounova, Kira*," she closed her eyes and looked again and read the long list carefully, to make sure.

Then she noticed that her brief case was open; she clasped the catch carefully; she looked at the hole in her glove and stuck her finger out, trying to see how far it would go, and

wisted an unraveled thread into a little snake and watched it uncoil.

Then she felt that someone was watching her. She turned. Andrei stood alone in a window niche. He was looking at her, but he did not move forward, he did not say a word, he did not incline his head in greeting. She knew what he feared, what he hoped, what he was waiting for. She walked to him, and looked up at him, and extended her hand with the same trusting smile he had known on the same young lips, only the lips trembled a little.

"It's all right, Andrei. I know you couldn't help it."

She had not expected the gratitude, a gratitude like pain, in his low voice when he answered: "I'd give you my place—if I could."

"Oh, it's all right. . . . Well . . . I guess I won't be a builder after all. . . . I guess I won't build any aluminum bridges." She tried to laugh. "It's all right, because everybody always told me one can't build a bridge of aluminum anyway." She noticed that it was harder for him to smile than for her. "And, Andrei," she said softly, knowing that he did not dare to ask it, "this doesn't mean that we won't see each other any more, does it?"

He took her hand in both of his. "It doesn't, Kira, if . . ."

"Well, then, it doesn't. Give me your phone number and address, so I can call you, because we . . . we won't meet here . . . any more. We're such good friends that—isn't it funny?—I've never even known your address. All's for the best. Maybe . . . maybe we'll be better friends now."

*

When she came home, Leo was sprawled across the bed, and he didn't get up. He looked at her and laughed. He laughed dryly, monotonously, senselessly.

She stood still, looking at him.

"Thrown out?" he asked, rising on a wavering elbow, his hair falling over his face. "Don't have to tell me. I know. You're kicked out. Like a dog. So am I. Like two dogs. Congratulations, Kira Alexandrovna. Hearty proletarian congratulations!"

"Leo, you've . . . you've been drinking!"

"Sure. To celebrate. All of us did. Dozens and dozens of us at the University. A toast to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. . . . Many toasts to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. . . . Don't stare at me like that. . . . It's a good old

drink at births, and weddings, and funerals. . . . Well, we weren't born together, Comrade Argounova. . . . And we've never had a wedding, Comrade Argounova. . . . But we might yet see the other. . . . We might. . . . yet. . . . the other. . . . Kira. . . ."

She was on her knees by the bed, gathering to her breast a pale face with a contorted wound of a mouth, she was brushing damp hair off his forehead, she was whispering: "Leo. . . . dearest. . . . you shouldn't do that. . . . Now's the time you shouldn't. . . . We have to think clearly now. . . ." She was whispering without conviction. "It's not dangerous so long as we don't give up. . . . You must take care of yourself, Leo. . . . You must spare yourself. . . ."

His mouth spat out: "For what?"

*

Kira met Vasili Ivanovitch in the street.

It took an effort not to let her face show the change of his. She had seen him but once since Maria Petrovna's death, and he had not looked like that. He walked like an old man. His clear, proud eyes darted at every face, a bitter look of suspicion, and hatred, and shame. His wrinkled, sinewy hands tottered uncertainly in useless movements, like an old woman's. Two lines were slashed from the corners of his lips to his chin, lines of such suffering that one felt guilty of intrusion for having seen and guessed.

"Kira, glad to see you again, glad to see you," he muttered, his voice, his words clinging to her helplessly. "Why don't you come over any more? It's sort of lonesome, at home. Or. . . or maybe you've heard. . . and don't want to come?"

She had not heard. But something in his voice told her not to ask him what it was that she could have heard. She said with her warmest smile: "Why, no, Uncle Vasili, I'll be glad to come. It's just that I've been working so hard. But I'll be over tonight, may I?"

She did not ask about Irina and Victor, and whether they, too, had been expelled. As after an earthquake, all were looking around cautiously, counting the victims, afraid to ask questions.

That night, after dinner, she called on the Dunaevs. She had persuaded Leo to go to bed; he had a fever; his cheekbones flamed with bright red spots; she had left a jug of cold tea by the bed and told him that she would be back early.

At a bare table without table cloth, under a lamp without

a shade, Vasili Ivanovitch sat reading an old volume of Chekhov. Irina her hair uncombed, sat drawing senseless figures on a huge sheet of paper. Acia slept, full dressed, curled in an armchair in a dark corner. A rusty "Bourgeoise" smoked. "Allo," said Irina, her lips twisting. Kira had never seen her smile like that.

"Would you like some tea, Kira? Hot tea? Only . . . only we have no saccharine left."

"No, thank you, Uncle Vasili, I've just had dinner."

"Well?" said Irina. "Why don't you say it? Expelled?"

Kira nodded.

"And Leo, too?"

Kira nodded.

"Well? Why don't you ask? Oh, I'll tell you myself: sure, I'm out. What could you expect? Daughter of the wealthy Court Furrier!"

"And—Victor?"

Irina and Vasili Ivanovitch exchanged a glance, a strange glance. "No," Irina answered slowly, "Victor is not expelled."

"I'm glad, Uncle Vasili. That's good news, isn't it?" She knew the best way to cheer her uncle: "Victor's such a talented young man, I'm glad they've spared his future."

"Yes," Vasili Ivanovitch said slowly, bitterly. "Victor is such a talented young man."

"She had a white lace gown," Irina said hysterically, "and, really, she has a gorgeous voice—oh—I mean—I'm speaking of the new production of 'La Traviata' at the Mikhailovsky Theater—and you've seen it, of course? Oh, well, you must see it. Old classics are . . . old classics are . . ."

"Yes," said Vasili Ivanovitch, "old classics are still the best. In those days, they had culture, and moral values, and . . . and integrity. . . ."

"Really," said Kira, nervous and bewildered, "I'll have to see 'La Traviata.'"

"In the last act," said Irina, "in the last act, she. . . . Oh, hell!" She threw her drawing board down with a crash that awakened Acia, who sat up staring, blinking. "You'll hear it sooner or later: Victor has joined the Party!"

Kira was holding the book of Chekhov and it clattered down to the floor. "He . . . what?"

"He joined the Party. The All-Union Communist Party. With a red star, a Party ticket, a bread card, and his hand in all the blood spilled, in all the blood to come!"

"Irina! How . . . how could he get admitted?"

She was afraid to look at Vasili Ivanovitch. She knew she should not ask questions, questions that were like knives turned in a wound; but she could not resist it.

"Oh, it seems he had it planned for a long time. He's been making friends—carefully and judiciously. He's been a candidate for months—and we never knew it. Then—he got admitted. Oh, they accepted him all right—with the kind of sponsors he had selected to vouch for his proletarian spirit, even though his father did sell furs to the Czar!"

"Did he know this—the purge, I mean—was coming?"

"Oh, don't be silly. It isn't that. Of course, he didn't know that in advance. He's aiming higher than merely to keep his place at the Institute. Oh, my brother Victor is a brilliant young man. When he wants to climb—he knows the stepping stones."

"Well," Kira tried to smile, to say for Vasili Ivanovitch's sake, without looking at him, "it's Victor's business. He knows what he wants. Is he . . . is he still here?"

"If it were up to me, he . . ." Irina checked herself abruptly. "Yes. The swine's still here."

"Irina," Vasili Ivanovitch said wearily, "he's your brother."

Kira changed the subject; but it was not easy to keep up a conversation. Half an hour later, Victor came in. The dignity of his expression and the red star in his lapel were very much in evidence.

"Victor," Kira said, "I hear you're a good Communist, now."

"I have had the honor of joining the All-Union Communist Party," Victor answered, "and I'll have it understood that the Party is not to be referred to lightly."

"Oh," said Kira. "I see."

But it happened that she did not see Victor's extended hand when she was leaving.

At the door, in the lobby, Irina whispered to her: "At first, I thought father would throw him out. But . . . with mother gone . . . and all . . . and you know how he's always been crazy about Victor . . . well, he thinks he'll try to be broad-minded. I think it will break him. . . . For God's sake, Kira, come often. He likes you."

*

Because there was no future, they hung on to the present. There were days when Leo sat for hours reading a book, and hardly spoke to Kira, and when he spoke his smile held

a bitter, endless contempt for himself, for the world, for eternity.

Once, she found him drunk, leaning against the table, staring intently at a broken glass on the floor.

"Leo! Where did you get it?"

"Borrowed it. Borrowed it from our dear neighbor Comrade Marisha. She always has plenty."

"Leo, why do you?"

"Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't I? Who in this whole damn world can tell me why I shouldn't?"

But there were days when a new calm suddenly cleared his eyes and his smile. He waited for Kira to come home from work and when she entered he drew her hastily into his arms. They could sit through an evening without a word, their presence, a glance, the pressure of a hand drugging them into security, making them forget the coming morning, all the coming mornings.

Arm in arm, they walked through silent, luminous streets in the white nights of spring. The sky was like dull glass glowing with a sunless radiance from somewhere beyond. They could look at each other, at the still, sleepless city, in the strange, milky light. He pressed her arm close to his, and when they were alone on a long street dawn-bright and empty, he bent to kiss her.

Kira's steps were steady. There were too many questions ahead; but here, beside her, were the things that gave her certainty: his straight, tense body, his long, thin hands, his haughty mouth with the arrogant smile that answered all questions. And, sometimes, she felt pity for those countless nameless ones somewhere around them who, in a feverish quest, were searching for some answer, and in their search crushed others, perhaps even her; but she could not be crushed, for she had the answer. She did not wonder about the future. The future was Leo.

*

Leo was too pale and he was silent too often. The blue on his temples looked like veins in marble. He coughed, choking. He took cough medicine, which did not help, and refused to see a doctor.

Kira saw Andrei frequently. She had asked Leo if he minded it. "Not at all," he had answered, "if he's your friend. Only—would you mind?—don't bring him here. I'm not sure I can be polite to . . . to one of them."

She did not bring Andrei to the house. She telephoned him on Sundays and smiled cheerfully into the receiver: "Feel like seeing me, Andrei? Two o'clock—Summer Garden—the quay entrance."

They sat on a bench, with the oak leaves fighting the glare of the sun above their heads, and they talked of philosophy. She smiled sometimes when she realized that Andrei was the only one with whom she could think and talk about thoughts.

They had no reason for meeting each other. Yet they met, and made dates to meet again, and she felt strangely comfortable, and he laughed at her short summer dresses, and his laughter was strangely happy.

Once, he invited her to spend a Sunday in the country. She had stayed in the city all summer; she could not refuse. Leo had found a job for Sunday: breaking the wooden bricks of pavements, with a gang repairing the streets. He did not object to her excursion.

In the country, she found a smooth sea sparkling in the sun; and a golden sand wind-pleated into faint, even waves; and the tall red candles of pines, their convulsed roots naked to the sand and wind, pine cones rolling to meet the sea shells.

Kira and Andrei had a swimming race, which she won. But when they raced down the beach in their bathing suits, sand flying from under their heels, spurting sand and water at the peaceful Sunday tourists, Andrei won. He caught her and they rolled down together, a whirl of legs, arms and mud, into the lunch basket of a matron who shrieked with terror. They disentangled themselves from each other and sat there screaming with laughter. And when the matron struggled to her feet, gathered her lunch and waddled away, grumbling something about "this vulgar modern youth that can't keep their love-affairs to themselves," they laughed louder.

They had dinner in a dirty little country restaurant, and Kira spoke English to the waiter who could not understand a word, but bowed low and stuttered and spilled water all over the table in his eagerness to serve the first comrade foreigner in their forgotten corner. When they were leaving, Andrei gave him twice the price of their dinner. The waiter bowed to the ground, convinced that he was dealing with genuine foreigners. Kira could not help looking a little startled. Andrei laughed when they went out: "Why not? Might as well make a waiter happy. I make more money than I can spend on myself anyway."

In the train, as it clattered into the evening and the smoke

of the city, Andrei asked: "Kira, when will I see you again?"

"I'll call you."

"No. I want to know now."

"In a few days."

"No. I want a definite day."

"Well, then, Wednesday night?"

"All right."

"After work, at five-thirty, at the Summer Garden."

"All right."

When she came home, she found Leo asleep in a chair, his hands dust-streaked, smears of dust on his damp, flushed face, his dark lashes blond with dust, his body limp with exhaustion.

She washed his face and helped him to undress. He coughed.

The two evenings that followed were long, furious arguments, but Leo surrendered: he promised to visit a doctor on Wednesday.

*

Vava Milovskaia had a date with Viotor for Wednesday night. Wednesday afternoon, Viotor telephoned her, his voice impatiently apologetic: he was detained on urgent business at the Institute and would not be able to see her. Urgent business had detained him the last three times he had promised to come. Vava had heard rumors; she had heard a name; she knew what to suspect.

In the evening, she dressed carefully; she pulled a wide black patent leather belt tight around the slim waist of her best new white coat; she touched her lips faintly, cautiously with her new foreign lipstick; she slipped on her foreign celluloid bracelet. She tilted her white hat recklessly over her black curls and told her mother that she was going out to call on Kira Argounova.

She hesitated on the stair landing before Kira's apartment, and her hand trembled a little when she pressed the bell.

The tenant opened the door. "To see Citizen Argounova?" This way, comrade," he told her. "You have to pass through Citizen Lavrova's room. This door here."

Resolutely, Vava jerked the door open without knocking.

They were there—together—Marisha and Victor—standing over the gramophone that played "The Fire of Moscow."

Victor's face was cold, silent fury. But Vava looked at him. She tossed her head up and said to him, as dramatically as she could, in a sharp, clear voice:

ing tears: "I beg your pardon, citizen, I'm just calling on Citizen Argounova."

Surprised and suspecting nothing, Marisha pointed to Kira's door with her thumb. Head high, Vava walked across the room. Marisha could not understand why Victor left in such a hurry.

Kira was not at home, but Leo was.

*

Kira had had a restless day. Leo had promised to telephone her at the office and tell her the doctor's diagnosis. He had not called. She telephoned him three times. There was no answer. On her way home, she remembered that it was Wednesday night and that she had a date with Andrei.

She could not keep him waiting indefinitely at a public park gate. She would drop by the Summer Garden and tell him that she couldn't stay. She reached the Garden on time.

Andrei was not there.

She looked up and down the darkening quay. She peered into the trees and shadows of the garden. She waited. Twice, she asked a militia-man what time it was. She waited. She could not understand it.

He did not come.

When she finally went home, she had waited for an hour.

She clutched her hands angrily in her pockets. She could not worry about Andrei when she thought of Leo, and the doctor, and of what she still had to hear. She hurried up the stairs. She darted through Marisha's room and flung the door open. On the davenport, her white coat trailing to the floor, Vava was clasped in Leo's arms, their lips locked together.

Kira stood looking at them calmly, an amazed question in her lifted eyebrows.

They jumped up. Leo was not very steady. He had been drinking again. He stood swaying, with his bitter, contemptuous smile.

Vava's face went a dark, purplish red. She opened her mouth, choking, without a sound. And as no one said a word, she screamed suddenly into the silence: "You think it's terrible, don't you? Well, I think so too! It's terrible, it's vile! Only I don't care! I don't care what I do! I don't care any more! I'm rotten? Well, I'm not the only one! Only I don't care! I don't care! I don't care!"

She burst into hysterical sobs and rushed out, slamming the door. The two others did not move.

He sneered: "Well, say it."

She answered slowly: "I have nothing to say."

"Listen, you might as well get used to it. You might as well get used to it that you can't have me. Because you can't have me. You won't have me. You won't have me long."

"Leo, what did the doctor say?"

He laughed: "Plenty."

"What is it you have?"

"Nothing. Not a thing."

"Leo!"

"Not a thing—yet. But I'm going to have it. Just a few weeks longer. I'm going to have it."

"What, Leo?"

He swayed with a grand gesture: "Nothing much. Just—tuberculosis."

*

The doctor asked: "Are you his wife?"

Kira hesitated, then answered: "No."

The doctor said: "I see." Then, he added: "Well, I suppose you have a right to know it. Citizen Kovalensky is in a very bad condition. We call it incipient tuberculosis. It can still be stopped—now. In a few weeks—it will be too late."

"In a few weeks—he'll have—tuberculosis?"

"Tuberculosis is a serious disease, citizen. In Soviet Russia—it is a fatal disease. It is strongly advisable to prevent it. If you let it start—you will not be likely to stop it."

"What . . . does he need?"

"Rest. Plenty of it. Sunshine. Fresh air. Food. Human food. He needs a sanatorium for this coming winter. One more winter in Petrograd would be as certain as a firing squad. You'll have to send him south."

She did not answer; but the doctor smiled ironically, for he heard the answer without words and he looked at the patches on her shoes.

"If that young man is dear to you," he said, "send ~~him~~ south. If you have a human possibility—or an inhuman ~~one~~—send him south."

*

Kira was very calm when she walked h---

When she came in, Leo was standing b
turned slowly. His face was so profoundly
that he looked younger; he looked as if :

night of rest; he asked quietly: "Where have you been, Kira?"

"At the doctor's."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't want you to know all that."

"He told me."

"Kira, I'm sorry about last night. About that little fool. I hope you didn't think that I . . ."

"Of course, I didn't. I understand."

"I think it's because I was frightened. But I'm not—now. Everything seems so much simpler—when there's a limit set. . . . The thing to do now, Kira, is not to talk about it. Don't let's think about it. There's nothing we can do—as the doctor probably told you. We can still be together—for a while. When it becomes contagious—well . . ."

She was watching him. Such was his manner of accepting his death sentence.

She said, and her voice was hard: "Nonsense, Leo. You're going south."

*

In the first State hospital she visited, the official in charge told her: "A place in a sanatorium in the Crimea? He's not a member of the Party? And he's not a member of a Trade Union? And he's not a State employee? You're joking, citizen."

In the second hospital, the official said: "We have hundreds on our waiting list, citizen. Trade Union members. Advanced cases. . . . No, we cannot even register him."

In the third hospital, the official refused to see her.

There were lines to wait in, ghastly lines of deformed creatures, of scars, and slings, and crutches, and open sores, and green, mucous patches of eyes, and grunts, and groans, and—over a line of the living—the smell of the morgue.

There were State Medical headquarters to visit, long hours of waiting in dim, damp corridors that smelt of carbolic acid and soiled linen. There were secretaries who forgot appointments, and assistants who said: "So sorry, citizen. Next, please"; there were young executives who were in a hurry, and attendants who groaned: "I tell you he's gone, it's after office hours, we gotta close, you can't sit here all night."

At the end of the first two weeks she learned, as firmly as if it were some mystic absolute, that if one had consumption one had to be a member of a Trade Union and get a Trade Union despatchment to a Trade Union Sanatorium.

There were officials to be seen, names mentioned, letters of recommendation offered, begging for an exception. There were

Trade Union heads to visit, who listened to her plea with startled, ironic glances. Some laughed; some shrugged; some called their secretaries to escort the visitor out; one said he could and he would, but he named a sum she could not earn in a year.

She was firm, erect, and her voice did not tremble, and she was not afraid to beg. It was her mission, her quest, her crusade.

She wondered sometimes why the words: "But he's going to die," meant so little to them, and the words: "But he's not a registered worker," meant so little to her, and why it seemed so hard to explain.

She made Leo do his share of inquiries. He obeyed without arguing, without complaining, without hope.

She tried everything she could. She asked Victor for help. Victor said with dignity: "My dear cousin, I want you to realize that my Party membership is a sacred trust not to be used for purposes of personal advantage."

She asked Marisha. Marisha laughed. "With all our sanatoriums stuffed like herring-barrels, and waiting lists till the next generation, and comrade workers rotting alive waiting—and here he's not even sick yet! You don't realize reality, Citizen Argounova."

She could not call on Andrei. Andrei had failed her.

For several days after the date he had missed, she called on Lydia with the same question: "Has Andrei Taganov been here? Have you had any letters for me?"

The first day, Lydia said: "No." The second day, she giggled and wanted to know what was this, a romance? and she'd tell Leo, and with Leo so handsome! and Kira interrupted impatiently: "Oh, stop this rubbish, Lydia! It's important. Let me know the minute you hear from him, will you?"

Lydia did not hear from him.

One evening, at the Dunaevs', Kira asked Victor casually if he had seen Andrei Taganov at the Institute. "Sure," said Victor, "he's there every day."

She was hurt. She was angry. She was bewildered. What had she done? For the first time, she questioned her own wisdom. Had she acted foolishly that Sunday in the committee room? To remember every word, every gesture. She could not fault. He had seemed happier than ever before. She decided that she must trust their friends.

yelling into the house: "Comrade Taganov!" with a positive inflection that implied his presence; there was a long pause; the landlady returned and asked: "Who's calling him?" and before she had pronounced the last syllable of her name, Kira heard the landlady barking: "He ain't home!" and slamming her receiver.

Kira slammed hers, too. She decided to forget Andrei Taganov.

It took a month, but at the end of a month, she was convinced that the door of the State sanatoriums was locked to Leo and that she could not unlock it.

There were private sanatoriums in the Crimea. Private sanatoriums cost money. She would get the money.

She made an appointment to see Comrade Voronov and asked for an advance on her salary, an advance of six months—just enough to start him off. Comrade Voronov smiled faintly and asked her how she could be certain that she would be working there another month, let alone six.

She called on Doctor Milovsky, Vava's father, her wealthiest acquaintance, whose bank account had been celebrated by many envious whispers. Doctor Milovsky's face got very red and his short, pudgy hands waved at Kira hysterically, as if shooing off a ghost: "My dear little girl, why, my dear little girl, what on earth made you think that I was rich or something? Heh-heh. Very funny indeed. A capitalist or something—heh-heh. Why, we're just existing, from hand to mouth, living by my own toil like proletarians one would say, barely existing, as one would say—that's it—from hand to mouth."

She knew her parents had nothing. She asked if they could try to help. Galina Petrovna cried.

She asked Vasili Ivanovitch. He offered her his last possession—Maria Petrovna's old fur jacket. The price of the jacket would not buy a ticket to the Crimea. She did not take it.

She knew Leo would resent it, but she wrote to his aunt in Berlin. She said in her letter: "I am writing, because I love him so much—to you, because I think you must love him a little." No answer came.

Through mysterious, stealthy whispers, more mysterious and stealthy than the G.P.U. who watched them sharply, she learned that there was private money to be lent, secretly and on a high percentage, but there was. She learned a name and an address. She went to the booth of a private trader in a

market, where a fat man bent down to her nervously across a counter loaded with red kerchiefs and cotton stockings. She whispered a name. She named a sum.

"Business?" he breathed. "Speculation?"

She knew it best to say yes. Well, he told her, it could be arranged. The rates were twenty-five per cent a month. She nodded eagerly. What security did the citizen have to offer? Security? Surely she knew they didn't lend it on her good looks? Furs or diamonds would do; good furs and any kind of diamonds. She had nothing to offer. The man turned away as if he had never spoken to her in his life.

On her way back to the tramway, through the narrow, muddy passages between the market stalls, she stopped, startled; in a little prosperous-looking booth, behind a counter heavy with fresh bread loaves, smoked hams, yellow circles of butter, she saw a familiar face: a heavy red mouth under a short nose with wide, vertical nostrils. She remembered the train speculator of the Nikolaevsky station, with the fur-lined coat and the smell of carnation oil. He had progressed in life. He was smiling at the customers, *from under a fringe of salami*.

On her way home, she remembered someone who had said: "I make more money than I can spend on myself." Did anything really matter now? She would go to the Institute and try to see Andrei.

She changed tramways for the Institute. She saw Andrei. She saw him coming down the corridor and he was looking straight at her, so that her lips moved in a smile of greeting; but he turned abruptly and slammed the door of an auditorium behind him.

She stood frozen to the spot for a long time.

When she came home, Leo was standing in the middle of the room, a crumpled paper in his hand, his face distorted by anger.

"So you would?" he cried. "So you're meddling in my affairs now? So you're writing letters? Who asked you to write?"

On the table, she saw an envelope with a German stamp. It was addressed to Leo. "What does she say, Leo?"

"You want to know? You really want to know?"

He threw the letter at her face.

She remembered only the sentence: "There is no reason why you should expect any help from us; the less reason since you are living with a brazen harlot who has the impudence to write to respectable people."

On the first rainy day of autumn, a delegation from a Club of Textile Women Workers visited the "House of the Peasant." Comrade Sonia was an honorary member of the delegation. When she saw Kira at the filing cabinet in Comrade Bitiuk's office, Comrade Sonia roared with laughter: "Well, well, well! A loyal citizen like Comrade Argounova in the Red 'House of the Peasant'!"

"What's the matter, comrade?" Comrade Bitiuk inquired nervously, obsequiously. "What's the matter?"

"A joke," roared Comrade Sonia, "a good joke!"

Kira shrugged with resignation; she knew what to expect.

When a reduction of staffs came to the "House of the Peasant" and she saw her name among those dismissed as "anti-social element," she was not surprised. It made no difference now. She spent most of her last salary to buy eggs and milk for Leo, which he would not touch.

*

In the daytime, Kira was calm, with the calm of an empty face, an empty heart, a mind empty of all thoughts but one. She was not afraid: because she knew that Leo had to go south, and he would go, and she could not doubt it, and so she had nothing to fear.

But there was the night.

She felt his body, icy and moist, close to hers. She heard him coughing. Sometimes, in his sleep, his head fell on her shoulder, and he lay there, trusting and helpless as a child, and his breathing was like a moan.

She saw the red bubble on Maria Petrovna's dying lips, and she heard her screaming: "Kira! I want to live! I want to live!"

She could feel Leo's breath in hot, panting gasps on her neck.

Then, she was not sure whether it was Maria Petrovna or Leo screaming when it was too late: "Kira! I want to live! I want to live!"

Was she going insane? It was so simple. She just needed money; a life, *his* life—and money.

"I make more money than I can spend on myself."

"Kira! I want to live! I want to live!"

*

She made one last attempt to get money.

She was walking down a street slippery with autumn rain, yellow lights melting on black sidewalks. The doctor had said every week counted; every day counted now. She saw a re-

splendent limousine stopping in the orange cube of light at a theater entrance. A man stepped out; his fur coat glistened like his automobile fenders. She stood in his path. Her voice was firm and clear:

"Please! I want to speak to you. I need money. I don't know you. I have nothing to offer you. I know it isn't being done like this. But you'll understand, because it's so important. It's to save a life."

The man stopped. He had never heard a plea that was a command. He asked, squinting one eye appraisingly: "How much do you need?"

She told him.

"What?" he gasped. "For one night? Why, your sisters don't make that in a whole career!"

He could not understand why the strange girl whirled around and ran across the street, straight through the puddles, as if he were going to run after her.

*

She made one last plea to the State.

It took many weeks of calls, letters, introductions, secretaries and assistants, but she got an appointment with one of Petrograd's most powerful officials. She was to see him in person, face to face. He could do it. Between him and the power he could use stood only her ability to convince him.

The official sat at his desk. A tall window rose behind him, admitting a narrow shaft of light, creating the atmosphere of a cathedral. Kira stood before him. She looked straight at him; her eyes were not hostile, nor pleading; they were clear, trusting, serene; her voice was very calm, very simple, very young.

"Comrade Commissar, you see, I love him. And he is sick. You know what sickness is? It's something strange that happens in your body and then you can't stop it. And then he dies. And now his life—it depends on some words and a piece of paper—and it's so simple when you just look at it as it is—it's only something made by us, ourselves, and perhaps we're right, and perhaps we're wrong, but the chance we're taking on it is frightful, isn't it? They won't send him to a sanatorium because they didn't write his name on a piece of paper with many other names and call it a membership in a Trade Union. It's only ink, you know, and paper, and something we think. You can write it and tear it up, and write it again. But the other—that which happens in one's body—you can't. You don't ask questions about that. C

know they are important, those things, money, and the Unions, and those papers, and all. And if one has to sacrifice and suffer for them, I don't mind. I don't mind if I have to work every hour of the day. I don't mind if my dress is old—like this—don't look at my dress, Comrade Commissar, I know it's ugly, but I don't mind. Perhaps, I haven't always understood you, and all those things, but I can be obedient and learn. Only—only when it comes to life itself, Comrade Commissar, then we have to be serious; don't we? We can't let those things take life. One signature of your hand—and he can go to a sanatorium, and he doesn't have to die. Comrade Commissar, if we just think of things, calmly and simply—as they are—do you know what death is? Do you know that death is—nothing at all, not at all, never again, never, no matter what we do? Don't you see why he can't die? I love him. We all have to suffer. We all have things we want, which are taken away from us. It's all right. But—because we are living beings—there's something in each of us, something like the very heart of life condensed—and *that* should not be touched. You understand, don't you? Well, he is that to me, and you can't take him from me, because you can't let me stand here, and look at you, and talk, and breathe, and move, and then tell me you'll take him—we're not insane, both of us, are we, Comrade Commissar?"

The Comrade Commissar said: "One hundred thousand workers died in the civil war. Why—in the face of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics—can't one aristocrat die?"

Kira walked home very slowly and looked at the dark city; she looked at the glistening pavements built for many thousands of old shoes; at the tramways for men to ride in; at the stone cubes into which men crawled at night; at the posters that cried of what men dreamed and of what men ate; and she wondered whether any of those thousands of eyes around her saw what she saw, and why it had been given her to see.

*

Because:

In a kitchen on the fifth floor, a woman bent over a smoking stove and stirred cabbage in a kettle, and the cabbage smelt, and the woman blinked, and groaned with the pain in her back, and scratched her head with the spoon,

Because:

In a corner saloon, a man leaned against the bar and raised a foaming glass of beer, and the foam spilled over the floor and over his trousers, and he belched and sang a gay song,

Because:

In a white bed, on white sheets stained with yellow, a child slept and sniveled in its sleep, its nose wet,

Because:

On a sack of flour in the basement, a man tore a woman's pants off, and bit into her throat, and they rolled, moaning, over the sacks of flour and potatoes,

Because:

In the silence of stone walls slowly dripping frozen dampness, a figure knelt before a gilded cross, and raised trembling arms in exaltation, and knocked a pale forehead against a cold stone floor,

Because:

In the roar of machines whirling lightnings of steel and drops of burning grease, men swung vigorous arms, and panted, heaving chests of muscles glistening with sweat, and made soap,

Because:

In a public bath, steam rose from brass pans, and red, gelatinous bodies shook scrubbing themselves with the soap, sighing and grunting, trying to scratch steaming backs, and murky water and soap suds ran down the floor into the drain—

—Leo Kovalensky was sentenced to die.

XVII

It was her last chance and she had to take it.

A modest house stood before her, on a modest street that lay deserted in the darkness. An old landlady opened the door and looked at Kira suspiciously: Comrade Taganov did not receive women visitors. But she said nothing and shuffled, leading Kira down a corridor, then stopped, pointed at a door and shuffled away.

Kira knocked.

His voice said: "Come in."

She entered.

He was sitting at his desk and he was about to rise, but he didn't. He sat looking at her, and then rose very slowly, so

slowly that she wondered how long she stood there, at the door, while he was rising, his eyes never leaving her.

Then, he said: "Good evening, Kira."

"Good evening, Andrei."

"Take your coat off."

She was suddenly frightened, uncomfortable, uncertain; she lost all the bitter, hostile assurance that had brought her here; obediently, she took off her coat and threw her hat on the bed. It was a large, bare room with whitewashed walls, a narrow iron bed, one desk, one chair, one chest of drawers, no pictures, no posters, but books, an ocean of books and papers and newspapers, running over the desk, over the chest, over the floor.

He said: "It's cold tonight, isn't it?"

"It's cold."

"Sit down."

She sat by the desk. He sat on the bed, his hands clasping his knees. She wished he would not look at her like that, every second of every long minute. But he said calmly: "How have you been, Kira? You look tired."

"I am a little tired."

"How is your job?"

"It isn't."

"What?"

"Reduction of staffs."

"Oh, Kira, I'm sorry. I'll get you another one."

"Thanks. But I don't know whether I need one. How is your job?"

"The G.P.U.? I've been working hard. Searches, arrests. You still aren't afraid of me, are you?"

"No."

"I don't like searches."

"Do you like arrests?"

"I don't mind—when it's necessary."

They were silent, and then she said: "Andrei, if I make you uncomfortable—I'll go."

"No! Don't go. Please don't go." He tried to laugh. "Make me uncomfortable? What makes you say that? I'm just . . . just a little embarrassed . . . this room of mine . . . it's in no condition to receive such a guest."

"Oh, it's a nice room. Big. Light."

"You see, I'm home so seldom, and when I am, I just have time to fall in bed, without noticing what's around me."

"Oh."

They were silent.

"How is your family, Kira?"

"They are fine, thank you."

"I often see your cousin, Victor Dunaev, at the Institute. Do you like him?"

"No."

"Neither do I."

They were silent.

"Victor has joined the Party," said Kira.

"I voted against him. But most of them were eager to admit him."

"I'm glad you voted against him. He's the kind of Party man I despise."

"What kind of Party man don't you despise, Kira?"

"Your kind, Andrei."

"Kira . . ." It began as a sentence, but stopped on the first word.

She said resolutely: "Andrei, what have I done?"

He looked at her, and frowned, and looked aside, shaking his head slowly: "Nothing." Then he asked suddenly: "Why did you come here?"

"It's been such a long time since I saw you last."

"Two months, day after tomorrow."

"Unless you saw me at the Institute three weeks ago."

"I saw you."

She waited, but he did not explain, and she tried to ignore it, her words almost a plea: "I came because I thought . . . because I thought maybe you wanted to see me."

"I didn't want to see you."

She rose to her feet.

"Don't go, Kira!"

"Andrei, I don't understand!"

He stood facing her. His voice was flat, harsh as an insult: "I didn't want you to understand. I didn't want you to know. But if you want to hear it—you'll hear it. I never wanted to see you again. Because . . ." His voice was like a dull whip. "Because I love you."

Her hands fell limply against the wall behind her. He went on: "Don't say it. I know what you're going to say. I've said it to myself again and again and again. I know every word. But it's useless. I know I should be ashamed, and I am, but it's useless. I know that you liked me, and trusted me, because we were friends. It was beautiful and rare, at . . . right to despise me."

She stood pressed to the wall, not moving.

"When you came in, I thought 'Send her away.' But I knew that if you went away, I'd run after you. I thought 'I won't say a word.' But I knew that you'd know it before you left. I love you. I know you'd think kindlier of me if I said that I hate you."

She said nothing; she cringed against the wall, her eyes wide, her glance holding no pity for him, but a plea for his pity.

"You're frightened? Do you see why I couldn't face you? I knew what you felt for me and what you could never feel. I knew what you'd say, how your eyes would look at me. When did it start? I don't know. I knew only that it must end—because I couldn't stand it. To see you, and laugh with you, and talk of the future of humanity—and think only of when your hand would touch mine, of your feet in the sand, the little shadow on your throat, your skirt blowing in the wind. To discuss the meaning of life—and wonder if I could see the line of your breast in your open collar!"

She whispered: "Andrei . . . don't. . . ."

It was not an admission of love, it was the confession of a crime: "Why am I telling you all this? I don't know. I'm not sure I'm really saying it to you. I've been crying it to myself so often, for such a long time! You shouldn't have come here. I'm not your friend. I don't care if I hurt you. All you are to me is only this: I want you."

She whispered: "Andrei . . . I didn't know. . . ."

"I didn't want you to know. I tried to stay away from you, to break it. You don't know what it's done to me. There was one search. There was a woman. We arrested her. She rolled on the floor, in her nightgown, at my feet, crying for mercy. I thought of you. I thought of you there, on the floor, in your nightgown, crying for pity as I have been crying to you so many months. I'd take you—and I wouldn't care if it were the floor, and if those men stood looking. Afterward, perhaps I'd shoot you, and shoot myself—but I wouldn't care—because it would be afterward. I thought I could arrest you—in the middle of the night—and carry you wherever I wanted—and have you. I could do it, you know. I laughed at the woman and kicked her. My men stared at me—they had never seen me do that. They took the woman to jail—and I found an excuse to run away, to walk home alone—thinking of you. . . . Don't look at me like that. You don't have to be afraid that I'd do it. . . . I have nothing to offer you. I can-

not offer you my life. My life is twenty-eight years of that for which you feel contempt. And you—you're everything I've always expected to hate. But I want you. I'd give everything I have—everything I could ever have—Kira—for something you can't give me!"

He saw her eyes open wide at a thought he could not guess. She breathed: "What did you say, Andrei?"

"I said, everything I have for something you can't. . . ."

It was terror in her eyes, a terror of the thought she had seen for a second so very clearly. She whispered, trembling: "Andrei . . . I'd better go. . . . I'd better go now."

But he was looking at her fixedly, approaching her, asking in a voice suddenly very soft and low: "Or is it something you . . . can . . . Kira?"

She was not thinking of him; she was not thinking of Leo; she was thinking of Maria Petrovna and of the red bubble on dying lips. She was pressed to the wall, cornered, her ten fingers spread apart on the white plaster. His voice, his hope were driving her on. Her body rose slowly against the wall, to her full height, higher, on tiptoe, her head thrown back, so that her throat was level with his mouth when she threw at him:

"I can! I love you."

She wondered how strange it was to feel a man's lips that were not Leo's.

She was saying: "Yes . . . for a long time . . . but I didn't know that you, too . . ." and she felt his hands and his mouth, and she wondered whether this was joy or torture to him and how strong his arms were. She hoped it would be quick.

*

The street light beyond the window made a white square and a black cross on the wall above the bed. Against the white square, she could see his face on the pillow; he did not move. Her arm, stretched limply against his naked body, felt no movement but the beating of his heart.

She threw the blanket off, and sat up, crossing her arms over her breasts, her hands clutching her bare shoulders.

"Andrei, I'm going home."

"Kira! Not now. Not tonight."

"I have to go."

"I want you here. Till morning."

"I have to go. There's . . . there's my family
we'll have to leave this."

"Kira, will you marry me?"

She did not answer. He felt her trembling. He pulled her down and tucked the blanket under her chin.

"Kira, why does that frighten you?"

"Andrei . . . Andrei . . . I can't. . . ."

"I love you."

"Andrei . . . there's my family. You're a Communist. You know what they are. You must understand. They've suffered so much. If I marry you—it would be too much for them. Or if they learn—about this. We can spare them. Does it . . . does it make any difference to us?"

"No. Not if you want it that way."

"Andrei!"

"Yes, Kira?"

"You'll do anything I want?"

"Anything."

"I want only one thing: secrecy. Complete secrecy. You promise?"

"Yes."

"You see . . . with me—there's my family. With you—there's the Party. I'm not . . . I'm not the kind of a . . . mistress your Party would approve. So it's better . . . You see, it's a dangerous thing we're doing. A very dangerous thing. I want to try not to let it . . . not to let it break our lives."

"Break our lives? Kira!" He was laughing happily, pressing her hand to his lips.

"It's better if no one—not a soul anywhere—knows this, but you and I."

"No, Kira, I promise, no one will know but you and I."

"And now I'll go."

"No. Please don't go tonight. Just tonight. You can explain to them somehow—make up a reason. But stay. I can't let you go. . . . Please, Kira. . . . Just to see you here when I awaken. . . . Good night . . . Kira. . . ."

*

She lay very still for a very long time, until he was asleep. Then she slipped noiselessly out of bed and, holding her breath, her bare feet soundless on the cold floor, she dressed hurriedly. He did not hear her open the door and slip out.

There was a wind whistling down the long, empty streets and a sky like pencil lead. She walked very fast. She knew there was something she had to escape and she tried to hurry.

The dead, dark glass panes were watching her, following her, rows and rows of them, on guard along her way. She walked faster. Her steps beat too loudly and the houses of the whole city threw echoes back at her, echoes screaming something. She walked faster. The wind whirled her coat, raising it high over her knees, hurling it between her legs. She walked faster. She passed the poster of a worker with a red banner; the worker was laughing.

Suddenly she was running, like a shivering streak between dark shop windows and lamp posts, her coat whistling, her steps beating like a machine gun, her legs flashing and blending, like the spokes of a wheel, into one circle of motion carrying her forward. She was running or flying or being rocketed through space by something outside her body, and she knew it was all right, everything was all right if only she could run faster and faster and faster.

She came panting up the stairs. At the door, she stopped. She stopped and stood looking at the door knob, panting. And suddenly she knew that she could not go in; that she could not take her body into Leo's room, into his bed, close to his body. She ran her finger tips over the door, feeling it, caressing it uncertainly, for she could come no closer to him.

She sat down on the steps. She felt as if she could hear him—somewhere behind that door—sleeping, breathing with effort. She sat there for a long time, her eyes empty.

When she turned her head and saw that the square of the window on the landing was a dark, bright blue which was not night any longer, she got up, took her key and went in. Leo was asleep. She sat by the window, gathered into a tight huddle. He would not know what time she had come home.

*

Leo was leaving for the south.

His bag was packed. His ticket was bought. His place was reserved in a private sanatorium in Yalta and a month paid for in advance.

She had explained about the money: "You see, when I wrote to your aunt in Berlin, I also wrote to my uncle in Budapest. Oh, yes, I have an uncle in Budapest. You've never heard him mentioned because . . . you see . . . there's a family quarrel behind it—and he left Russia before the war, and my father forbade us ever to mention his name. He's not a bad fellow, and he always liked me, what he sent, and he said he'd h

But please don't ever mention it to my family, because father would—you understand."

She wondered dimly how simple and easy it was to lie.

To Andrei, she had mentioned her starving family. She did not have to ask; he gave her his whole monthly salary and told her to leave him only what she could spare. She had expected it, but it was not an easy moment when she saw the bills in her hand; then, she remembered the comrade commissar and why one aristocrat could die in the face of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics—and she kept most of the money, with a hard, bright smile.

It had not been easy to convince Leo to go. He said he would not let her—or her uncle—keep him. He said it tenderly and he said it furiously. It took many hours and many evenings. "Leo—your money or my money or anyone's money—does it really matter? Who made it matter? But you want to live. I want you to live. So much is still possible to us. You love me. Don't you love me enough to live for me? I know it will be hard. Six months. All winter. I'll miss you. But we can do it. . . . Leo, I love you. I love you. I love you. So much is still possible!"

She won.

His train was to leave at eight-fifteen in the evening. At nine, she would meet Andrei; she had asked him to take her to the opening of a new cabaret.

Leo was silent when they left their room, and in the cab on the way to the station. She went into the car with him to see the wooden bench on which he was to sleep for many nights; she had brought a pillow for him and a warm plaid blanket. Then, they stepped out again and waited on the platform by the car. They had nothing to say.

When the first bell rang, Leo said: "Please, Kira, don't let's have any nonsense when the train starts. I won't look out of the window. No waving, or running after the train, or anything like that."

"No, Leo."

She looked at a poster on a steel pillar; it promised a huge orchestra, foreign fox-trots and delicious food at the grand opening of the new cabaret, at nine o'clock tonight. She said, wondering, bewildered, a little frightened, as if realizing it for the first time: "Leo . . . at nine o'clock tonight . . . you won't be here any more."

"No. I won't."

The third bell rang.

He seized her roughly and held her lips in a long, choking kiss, as long as the train whistle that wailed shrilly. He whispered: "Kira . . . my own only one. . . . I love you. . . . I love you so much. . . ."

He leaped to the steps of the car as it started moving, and disappeared inside. He did not come to the window.

She stood and heard iron chains stretching, wheels grinding rails, the engine panting far ahead, white steam spreading slowly under the steel vaults. The yellow squares of windows were suddenly pulled past her. The station smelt of carbolic acid. A faded red banner hung on a steel girder. The windows were streaming faster and faster, melting into a yellow line. There was nothing ahead but steel, steam, smoke and, under an arch very far away, a piece of sky black as a hole.

And suddenly she understood that it was a train, and that Leo was on the train, and that the train was leaving her. And something beyond terror, immense and unnamable, something which was not a human feeling, seized her. She ran after the train. She grasped an iron handle. She wanted to stop it. She knew that there was something huge and implacable moving over her, which she had to stop, which she was alone to stop, and couldn't. She was jerked forward, falling, she was whirled along down the wooden planks of the platform, and then a husky soldier in a peaked khaki cap with a red star grabbed her by the shoulders, and tore her off the handle, and threw her aside, pushing her away from the train with his elbow in her breast.

He roared:

"What do you think you're doing, citizen?"

❖ *Part Two* ❖

I

It was St. Petersburg; the war made it Petrograd; the revolution made it Leningrad.

It is a city of stone, and those living in it think not of stone brought upon a green earth and piled block on block to raise a city, but of one huge rock carved into streets, bridges, houses, and earth brought in handfuls, scattered; ground into the stone to remind them of that which lies beyond the city.

Its trees are rare strangers, sickly foreigners in a climate of granite, forlorn and superfluous. Its parks are reluctant concessions. In spring, a rare dandelion sticks a bright yellow head through the stones of its embankments, and men smile at it incredulously and condescendingly as at an impudent child. Its spring does not rise from the soil; its first violets, and very red tulips, and very blue hyacinths come in the hands of men, on street corners.

Petrograd was not born; it was created. The will of a man raised it where men did not choose to settle. An implacable emperor commanded into being the city and the ground under the city. Men brought earth to fill a swamp where no living thing existed but mosquitoes. And like mosquitoes, men died and fell into the grunting mire. No willing hands came to build the new capital. It rose by the labor of soldiers, thousands of soldiers, regiments who took orders and could not refuse to face a deadly foe, a gun or a swamp. They fell, and the earth they brought and their bones made the ground for the city. "Petrograd," its residents say, "stands on skeletons."

Petrograd is not in a hurry; it is not lazy; it is gracious and

leisurely, as befits the freedom of its vast streets. It is a city that threw itself down amid the marshes and pine forests, luxuriously, both arms outflung. Its squares are paved fields; its streets are as broad as tributaries to the Neva, the widest river to cross a great city.

On Nevsky, the capital of the capital's streets, the houses were built by generations past for generations to come. They are set and unchangeable like fortresses; their walls are thick and their windows are tiers of deep niches, rising over wide sidewalks of reddish-brown granite. From the statue of Alexander III, a huge gray man on a huge gray horse, silver rails stretch tense and straight to the Admiralty building far away, its white colonnade and thin golden spire raised like the crown, the symbol, the trade mark of Nevsky, over the broken skyline where every turret and balcony and gargoyle bending over the street are ageless features of a frozen stone face.

A golden cross on a small golden cupola rises to the clouds halfway down Nevsky, over the Anichkovsky palace, a bare red cube slashed by bare gray windows. And further, beyond the palace, a chariot raises to the clouds the black heads of its rearing horses, their hoofs hanging high over the street, over the stately columns of the Alexandrinsky theater. The palace looks like a barracks; the theater looks like a palace.

At the foot of the palace, Nevsky is cut by a stream, and a bridge arches over its swirling, muddy water. Four black statues stand at the four corners of the bridge. They may be only an accident and an ornament; they may be the very spirit of Petrograd, the city raised by man against the will of nature. Each statue is of a man and a horse. In the first one, the furious hoofs of a rearing beast are swung high in the air, ready to crush the naked, kneeling man, his arm stretched in a first effort toward the bridle of the monster. In the second, the man is up on one knee, his torso leaning back, the muscles of his legs, of his arms, of his body ready to burst through his skin, as he pulls at the bridle, in the supreme moment of the struggle. In the third, they are face to face, the man up on his feet, his head at the nostrils of a beast bewildered by a first recognition of its master. In the fourth, the beast is tamed; it steps obediently, led by the hand of the man who is tall, erect, calm in his victory, stepping forward with serene assurance, his head held straight, his eyes looking steadily into an unfathomable future.

On winter nights, strings of large white globes flare up over Nevsky—and snow sparkles over the white lights like salt

crystals—and the colored lanterns of tramways, red, green, yellow, wink far away, swimming over a soft darkness—and through lashes moist with frost the white globes look like crosses of long white searchlights on a black sky.

Nevsky starts on the shore of the Neva, at a quay as trim and perfect as a drawing room, with a red-granite parapet and a row of palaces, of straight angles, tall windows, chaste columns and balustrades, severe, harmonious and luxuriously stern in their masculine grace.

Divided by the river, Petrograd's greatest mansion, the Winter Palace, faces Petrograd's greatest prison, the Peter-Paul Fortress. The Czars lived in the Winter Palace; when they died, they crossed the Neva: in the cathedral of the Fortress, white slabs rose over the graves of the Czars. The prison stood behind the cathedral. The walls of the Fortress guarded the dead Czars and the Czar's living enemies. In the long, silent halls of the palace, tall mirrors reflected the ramparts behind which men were forgotten, alive for decades in lonely stone graves.

Bridges rise over the river, as long humps of steel, with tramways crawling slowly up to the middle and rolling swiftly, clattering, down to the other shore. The right bank, beyond the Fortress, is a gradual surrender of the city to that earth, that countryside it has driven out; the Kamenostrovsky, a broad, quiet, endless avenue, is like a stream full of the fragrance of a future sea, a street where each step is a forecast of the country to come. The avenue and the city and the river end at the Islands, where the Neva breaks among bits of land held together by delicate bridges, where heavy white cones rise in tiers edged with dark green, over a deep silence of snow, and fir branches and bird footprints alone break the white desolation, and beyond the last island, the sky and sea are an unfinished water color of pale gray with a faint greenish band smeared across to mark a future horizon.

But Petrograd also has side streets. Petrograd's side streets are of colorless stone rain-washed into the gray of the clouds above and of the mud below. They are bare as jail corridors; they cut each other in naked corners of square buildings that look like prisons. Old gateways are locked at night over mud-swollen ruts. Little shops frown with faded signs over turbid windows. Little parks choke with consumptive grass into which mud and dust and mud again have been ground for a century. Iron parapets guard canals of refuse-thickened water.

On dark corners, rusty ikons of the Madonna are nailed over forgotten tin boxes, begging coppers for orphanages.

And farther up the Neva, rise forests of red-brick chimneys, spewing a black cloud that hangs over old, stooping, wooden houses, over an embankment of rotting logs at the placid, indifferent river. Rain falls slowly through the smoke; rain, smoke and stone are the theme-song of the city.

Petrograd's residents wonder, sometimes, at the strange bonds that hold them. After the long winter, they curse the mud and the stone, and cry for pine forests; they flee from the city as from a hated stepmother; they flee to green grass and sand and to the sparkling capitals of Europe. And, as to an unconquerable mistress, they return in the fall, hungry for the wide streets, the shrieking tramways and the cobblestones, serene and relieved, as if life were beginning again. "Petrograd," they say, "is the only City."

Cities grow like forests, like weeds. Petrograd did not grow. It was born finished and complete. Petrograd is not acquainted with nature. It was the work of man.

Nature makes mistakes and takes chances; it mixes its colors and knows little of straight lines. But Petrograd is the work of man who knows what he wants.

Petrograd's grandeur is unmarred, its squalor unrelieved. Its facets are cut clearly, sharply; they are deliberate, perfect with the straight-forward perfection of man's work.

Cities grow with a people, and fight for the place at the head of cities, and rise slowly up the steps of years. Petrograd did not rise. It came to be at the height. It was commanded to command. It was a capital before its first stone was laid. It was a monument to the spirit of man.

Peoples know nothing of the spirit of man, for peoples are only nature, and man is a word that has no plural. Petrograd is not of the people. It has no legend, no folklore; it is not glorified in nameless songs down nameless roads. It is a stranger, aloof, incomprehensible, forbidding. No pilgrims ever traveled to its granite gates. The gates had never been opened in warm compassion to the meek, the hurt and the ~~misguided~~ like the doors of the kindly Moscow. Petrograd does not want a soul; it has a mind.

And perhaps it is only a coincidence that in the Russians, Moscow is "she," while Petrograd is "he."

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the power in the name of the people, transferred their capital to the meek Moscow from the haughty aristocrat of cities.

In 1924, a man named Lenin died and the city was ordered to be called Leningrad. The revolution also brought posters to the city's walls, and red banners to its houses, and sunflower-seed shells to its cobblestones. It cut a proletarian poem into the pedestal of the statue of Alexander III, and put a red rag on a stick into the hand of Catherine II in a small garden off Nevsky. It called Nevsky "Prospect of October 25th" and Sadovaia, a cross street—"Street of July 3rd," in honor of dates it wanted remembered; and at the intersection, hefty conductoresses yell in the crowded tramways: "Corner of October twenty-fifth and July third! Terminal for yellow tickets. New fare, citizens!"

In the early summer of 1925 the State Textile Trust put out new cotton prints. And women smiled in the streets of Petrograd, women wearing dresses made of new materials for the first time in many years.

But there were only half-a-dozen patterns of prints in the city. Women in black and white checks passed women in black and white checks; women in red-dotted white met women in green-dotted white; women with spirals of blue on a gray dress met women with the same spirals of brown on a tan dress. They passed by like inmates of a huge orphanage, frowning, sullen, uncomfortable, losing all joy in their new garments.

In a store on Nevsky, the State Porcelain Trust displayed a glistening window of priceless china, a white tea service with odd, fuzzy, modern flowers engraved in thin black by the hand of a famous new artist. The service had stood there for months; no one could afford to buy it.

Windows sparkled with foreign imitation jewelry—strings of flowered wax beads, earrings of bright celluloid circles, the latest fashion, protected by a stupendous price from the wistful women who stopped to admire them.

In a street off Nevsky, a foreign book store had been opened; a window two floors high flaunted the glossy, radiant, incredible covers of volumes that had come from across the border.

Bright awnings spread over Nevsky's wide, dry sidewalks, and barometers sparkled in the sun with the clear, piercing fire of clean glass.

A huge cotton billboard stood leaning against a building, presenting the tense face, enormous eyes and long, thin hands of a famous actor painted in bold brush strokes under the name of a German film.

Pictures of Lenin looked down at the passersby, a suspicious face with a short beard and narrow Oriental eyes, draped in red bunting and mourning crêpe.

On street corners, in the sun, ragged men sold saccharine and plaster busts of Lenin. Sparrows chirped on telephone wires. Lines stood at the doors of co-operatives; women took off their jackets and, in short-sleeved, wrinkled blouses, offered flabby white arms to the first heat of the summer sun.

A poster hung high on a wall. On the poster, a huge worker swung a hammer toward the sky, and the shadow of the hammer fell like a huge black cross over the little buildings of the city under his boots.

Kira Argounova stopped by the poster to light a cigarette.

She took a paper box from the pocket of her old coat and, with two straight fingers, swiftly, without looking, swung a cigarette into her mouth. Then she opened her old handbag of imitation leather and took out an expensive foreign lighter engraved with her initials. She flicked a brief little flame, hurled a jet of smoke from the corner of her mouth and slammed the bag shut over the lighter. She jerked the frayed cuff of her coat sleeve and glanced at a sparkling watch on a narrow gold band. She swung forward; the high heels of her slippers rang hurriedly, resonantly down the granite sidewalk. Her slippers were patched; her legs displayed the tight, sheer luster of foreign silk stockings.

She walked toward an old palace that bore a red, five-pointed star over the entrance and an inscription in gold letters:

DISTRICT CLUB OF THE ALL-UNION COMMUNIST PARTY

Its glass door was severely, immaculately polished, but the latch on its garden gate was broken. Weeds grew over what had been gravelled walks, and cigarette stubs rocked softly in an abandoned fountain, around a dejected marble cupid with a greenish patch of rust across its stomach, at the dry mouth of an urn.

Kira hurried down deserted walks, through a thick, neglected green tangle that drowned the clatter of tramways outside; blue pigeons fluttered lazily into the branches at the sound of her steps, and a bee rocked on a heavy purple tuft of clover. A giant regiment of oaks stood with arms stretched, hiding the palace from the eyes of the street.

In the depths of the garden stood a small two-story

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linked to the palace by the bridge of a short gallery. The windows of the first floor were broken and a sparrow sat on a sharp glass edge, jerking its head sidewise to look into the mouldy, deserted rooms. But on a window sill of the second floor lay a pile of books.

The heavy, hand-carved door was not locked. Kira went in and swung impatiently up the long stairway. It was a very long stairway. It rose to the second floor in a straight line, an endless flight of bare stone steps, cracked and crumbling in little trails of gravel. The stairway had had a magnificent white balustrade; but the balustrade was broken; empty holes gaped over the jagged stumps of marble columns and their white bodies still lay at the foot of the stairs. Hollow echoes rolled against the walls, against the murals of graceful white swans on blue lakes, of rose garlands, of sensual nymphs fleeing from grinning satyrs; the murals were faded and cut by gashes of peeling plaster.

Kira knocked at the door on the top of the stairs.

Andrei Taganov opened it and stepped back, astonished; his eyes widened in the slow, incredulous glance of a man looking at a miracle that could not become habitual; he forgot to move, he stood before her, the collar of a white shirt thrown open at his sunburnt throat.

"Kira!"

She laughed, a clear, metallic laughter: "How are you, Andrei?"

His hands closed slowly, softly over her shoulders, so softly that she could not feel his hands, only their strength, their will holding her, bending her backward; but his lips on hers were brutal, uncontrollable. His eyes were closed; hers were open, looking indifferently up at the ceiling.

"Kira, I didn't expect you till tonight."

"I know. But you won't throw me out, will you?"

She stepped aside, preceding him through the dim little lobby into his room, throwing her bag on a chair, her hat on a table, with imperious familiarity.

She alone knew why Andrei Taganov had had to economize, that winter; why he had given up his room and moved into an abandoned wing of the palace, which the Party Club could not use and had given to him free of rent.

It had been the secret love nest of a prince. Many years ago, a forgotten sovereign had waited there for the light, stealthy footsteps and the rustle of a silk skirt up the long

marble stairway. His magnificent furniture was gone; but the walls, the fireplace and the ceiling remained.

The walls were covered with a white brocade hand-embroidered in delicate little wreaths of blue and silver leaves. A marble row of cupids with garlands and cornucopias spouting frozen white flowers encircled the cornice. A marble Leda reclined voluptuously in the embrace of white wings over the fireplace. And from the soft blue of a sky painted on the ceiling, among pale, downy clouds, white doves—that had watched long nights of luxurious orgies—now looked at an iron bed, broken-down chairs, a long unpainted table loaded with books in bright red covers, wooden boxes piled as a dresser, posters of Red Army soldiers hiding the splits in the white brocade, and a leather jacket hanging on a nail in a corner.

Kira said peremptorily: "I came now to tell you that I can't come tonight."

"Oh! . . . You can't, Kira?"

"No. I can't. Now don't look tragic. Here, I brought you something to cheer you up."

She took a small toy from her pocket, a glass tube that ended in a bulb filled with a red liquid in which a little black figure floated, trembling.

"What's that?"

She held the bulb in her closed fist, but the little figure did not move. "I can't do it. You try. Hold it this way."

She closed his fingers over the bulb. No expression, no movement of his told it to her, but she knew that he was not indifferent to the touch of her fingers on his, that all of the past winter had not made him accustomed and indifferent. The red liquid in the sealed tube spurted up suddenly in furious, boiling bubbles; the little black, horned figure jumped ecstatically up and down through the storm.

"See? They call it American Resident. I bought it on a street corner. Cute, isn't it?"

He smiled and watched the imp dancing. "Very cute. . . . Kira, why can't you come tonight?"

"It's . . . some business that I have to attend. Nothing important. Do you mind?"

"No. Not if it's inconvenient for you. Can you stay now?"

"Only for a little while." She tore her coat off and threw it on the bed.

"Oh, Kira!"

"Like it? It's your own fault. You insisted on a new dress."

The dress was red, very plain, very short, trimmed in black patent leather: a belt, four buttons, a flat round collar and a huge bow. She stood, leaning against the door, slouching a little, suddenly very fragile and young, a child's dress clinging to a body that looked as helpless and innocent as a child's, her tangled hair thrown back, her skirt high over slender legs pressed closely together, her eyes round and candid, but her smile mocking and confident, her lips moist, wide. He stood looking at her, frightened by a woman who looked more dangerous, more desirable than he had ever known.

She jerked her head impatiently: "Well? You don't like it?"

"Kira, you are . . . the dress is . . . so lovely. I've never seen a woman's dress like that."

"What do you know about women's dresses?"

"I looked through a whole magazine of Paris fashions at the Censorship bureau yesterday."

"You looking through a fashion magazine?"

"I was thinking of you. I wanted to know what women liked."

"And what did you learn?"

"Things I'd like you to have. Funny little hats. And slippers like sandals—with nothing but straps. And jewelry. Diamonds."

"Andreil! You didn't tell that to your comrades at the Censorship bureau, did you?"

He laughed, still looking at her intently, incredulously: "No. I didn't."

"Stop staring at me like that. What's the matter? Are you afraid to come near me?"

His fingers touched the red dress. Then his lips sank suddenly into the hollow of her naked elbow.

He sat in the deep niche of the window sill and she stood beside him, in the tight circle of his arms. His face was expressionless, and only his eyes laughed soundlessly, cried to her soundlessly what he could not say.

Then he was talking, his face buried in the red dress: "You know, I'm glad you came now, instead of tonight. There were still so many hours to wait. . . . I've never seen you like this. . . . I've tried to read and I couldn't. . . . Will you wear this dress next time? Was that your own idea, this leather bow? . . . Why do you look so . . . so much more grownup in a childish dress like this? . . . I like that bow. . . . Kira, you know, I've missed you so terribly. . . . Even when I'm working I . . ."

Her eyes were soft, pleading, a little frightened: "Andrei, you shouldn't think of me when you're working."

He said slowly, without smiling: "Sometimes, it's only thoughts of you that help me—through my work."

"Andrei! What's the matter?"

But he was smiling again: "Why don't you want me to think of you? Remember, last time you were here, you told me about that book you read with a hero called Andrei and you said you thought of me? I've been repeating it to myself ever since, and I bought the book. I know it isn't much, Kira, but . . . well . . . you don't say them often, things like that."

She leaned back, her hands crossed behind her head, mocking and irresistible: "Oh, I think of you so seldom I've forgotten your last name. Hope I read it in a book. Why, I've even forgotten that scar, right there, over your eye." Her finger was following the line of the scar, sliding down his forehead, erasing his frown; she was laughing, ignoring the plea she had understood.

"Kira, would it cost so very much to install a telephone in your house?"

"But they . . . we . . . have no electrical connections in the apartment. It's really impossible."

"I've wished so often that you had a phone. Then I could call you . . . once in a while. Sometimes, it's so hard to wait, just wait for you."

"Don't I come here as often as you wish, Andrei?"

"It isn't that. Sometimes . . . you see . . . I want just a look at you . . . the same day you've been here . . . sometimes even a minute after you've left. It's that feeling that you're gone and I have no way of calling, of finding you, no right to approach the house where you live, as if you had left the city. Sometimes, I look at all the people in the streets—and it frightens me—that feeling that you're lost somewhere among them—and I can't get to you, I can't scream to you over all those heads."

She said, implacably: "Andrei, you've promised never to call at my house."

"But wouldn't you allow me to telephone, if we could arrange it?"

"No. My parents might guess. And . . . oh, Andrei, we have to be careful. We have to be so careful—particularly now."

"Why particularly now?"

"Oh, no more than usual. It isn't so hard, is it, that one condition, just to be careful—for my sake?"

"No, dear."

"I'll come often. I'll still be here when you'll become tired of me."

"Kira, why do you say that?"

"Well, you'll be tired of me, some day, won't you?"

"You don't think that, do you?"

She said hastily: "No, of course not. . . . Well, of course, I love you. You know it. But I don't want you to feel . . . to feel that you're tied to me . . . that your life . . ."

"Kira, why don't you want me to say that my life. . . ."

"This is why I don't want you to say anything."

She bent and closed his mouth with a kiss that hurt it.

Beyond the window, some club member in the palace was practising the "Internationale," slowly, with one hand, on a sonorous concert piano.

Andrei's lips moved hungrily over her throat, her hands, her shoulders. He tore himself away with an effort. He made himself say lightly, gaily, as an escape, rising: "I have something for you, Kira. It was for tonight. But then . . ."

He took a tiny box from a drawer of his desk, and pressed it into her hand. She protested helplessly: "Oh, Andrei, you shouldn't. I've asked you not to. With all you've done for me and . . ."

"I've done nothing for you. I think you're too unselfish. It has always been your family. I've had to fight to have you get this dress."

"And the stockings, and the lighter, and . . . Oh, Andrei, I'm so grateful to you, but . . ."

"But don't be afraid to open it."

It was a small, flat bottle of real French perfume. She gasped. She wanted to protest. But she looked at his smile and she could only laugh happily: "Oh, Andrei!"

His hand moved slowly in the air, without touching her, following the line of her neck, her breast, her body, cautiously, attentively, as if modeling a statue.

"What are you doing, Andrei?"

"Trying to remember."

"What?"

"Your body. As you stand—just now. Sometimes when I'm alone, I try to draw you in the air—like this—to feel as if you were standing before me."

She pressed herself closer to him. Her eyes were growing

darker; her smile seemed slow and heavy. She said, extending the perfume bottle: "You must open it. I want you to give me the first drop—yourself." She drew him down to her side, on the bed. She asked: "Where will you put it?"

His finger tips moist with the bewildering fragrance from another world, he pressed them timidly into her hair.

She laughed defiantly: "Where else?"

His finger tips brushed her lips.

"Where else?"

His hand drew a soft line down her throat, stopping abruptly at the black patent leather collar.

Her eyes holding his, she jerked her collar, tearing the snaps of her dress open. "Where else?"

He was whispering, his lips on her breast: "Oh, Kira, Kira, I wanted you—here—tonight. . . ."

She leaned back, her face dark, challenging, pitiless, her voice low: "I'm here—now."

"But . . ."

"Why not?"

"If you don't . . ."

"I do. That's why I came."

And as he tried to rise, her arms pulled him down imperiously. She whispered: "Don't bother to undress. I haven't the time."

*

He could forgive her the words, for he had forgotten them, when he saw her exhausted, breathing jerkily, her eyes closed, her head limp in the curve of his arm. He was grateful to her for the pleasure he had given her.

He could forgive anything, when she turned to him suddenly at the door, gathering her coat over the wrinkled red dress, when she whispered, her voice pleading, wistful and tender: "You won't miss me too much till next time, will you? . . . I . . . I've made you happy, haven't I?"

*

She ran swiftly up the stairs to her apartment, the home that had been Admiral Kovalensky's. She unlocked the door, looking impatiently at her wristwatch.

In the former drawing room, Marisha Lavrova was busy, standing over a Primus, stirring a kettle of soup with one hand, holding a book in the other, memorizing aloud: "The relationships of social classes can be studied c

the distribution of the economic means of production at any given historical . . ."

Kira stopped beside her. "How's the Marxist theory, Marisha?" she interrupted loudly, tearing her hat off, shaking her hair. "Do you have a cigarette? Smoked my last one on the way home."

Marisha nodded with her chin toward the dresser. "In the drawer," she answered. "Light one for me, too, will you? How's things?"

"Fine. Wonderful weather outside. Real summer. Busy?"

"Uh-uh. Have to give a lecture at the Club tomorrow—on Historical Materialism."

Kira lighted two cigarettes and stuck one into Marisha's mouth.

"Thanks," Marisha acknowledged, swirling the spoon in the thick mixture. "Historical Materialism and noodle soup. That's for a guest," she winked slyly. "Guess you know him. Name's Victor Dunaev."

"I wish you luck. You and Victor both."

"Thanks. How's everything with you? Heard from the boy friend lately?"

Kira answered reluctantly: "Yes. I received a letter. . . . And a telegram."

"How's he getting along? When's he coming back?"

It was as if Kira's face had frozen suddenly into a stern, reverent calm, as if Marisha were looking again at the austere Kira of eight months ago. She answered:

"Tonight."

III

A telegram lay on the table before Kira. It contained four words:

"Arriving June fifth. Leo."

She had read it often; but two hours remained till the arrival of the Crimean train and she could still re-read it many times. She spread it out on the gray, faded satin cover of the bed and knelt by its side, carefully smoothing every wrinkle of the paper. It had four words: a word for every two months

past; she wondered how many days she had paid for every letter, she did not try to think of how many hours and of what the hours had been.

But she remembered how many times she had cried to herself: "It doesn't matter. He'll come back—saved." It had become so simple and so easy: if one could reduce one's life to but one desire—life could be cold, clear and bearable. Perhaps others still knew that there were people, streets, and feelings; she didn't; she knew only that he would come back saved. It had been a drug and a disinfectant; it had burned everything out and left her icy, limpid, smiling.

There had been her room—suddenly grown so empty that she wondered, bewildered, how four walls could hold such an enormous void. There had been mornings when she awakened to stare at a day as dim and hopeless as the gray square of snow clouds in the window, and it took her a tortured effort to rise; days when each step across the room was a conquest of will, when all the objects around her, the Primus, the cupboard, the table, were enemies screaming to her of what they had shared with her, of what they had lost.

But Leo was in the Crimea where every minute was a ray of sunlight, and every ray of sunlight—a new drop of life.

There had been days when she fled from her room to people and voices, and fled from the people, for she found herself suddenly still lonelier, and she fled to wander through the streets, her hands in her pockets, her shoulders hunched, watching the sleigh runners, the sparrows, the snow around the lights, begging of them something she could not name. Then she returned home, and lighted the "Bourgeoise," and ate a half-cooked dinner on a bare table, lost in a dim room, crushed under the huge sound of the logs crackling, the clock ticking on a shelf, hoofs crunching snow beyond the window.

But Leo drank milk and ate fruit with skins bursting into fresh, sparkling juice.

There had been nights when she buried her head under the blanket and her face in the pillow, as if trying to escape from her own body, a body burning with the touch of a stranger's hands—in the bed that had been Leo's.

But Leo was lying on a beach by the sea and his body was growing suntanned.

There had been moments when she saw, in sudden astonishment, as if she had not grasped it before, just what she was doing to her own body; then she closed her eyes and hid her face behind

that thought was another one, more frightening, forbidden: of what she was doing to another man's soul.

But Leo had gained five pounds and the doctors were pleased.

There had been moments when she felt as if she were actually seeing the downward movement of a smiling mouth, the swift, peremptory wave of a long, thin hand, seeing them for a second briefer than lightning, and then her every muscle screamed with pain, so that she thought that she was not alone to hear it.

But Leo wrote to her.

She read his letters, trying to remember the inflection of his voice as it would pronounce each word. She spread the letters around her and sat in the room as with a living presence.

He was coming back, cured, strong, saved. She had lived eight months for one telegram. She had never looked beyond it. Beyond the telegram, there was no future.

*

The train from the Crimea was late.

Kira stood on the platform, motionless, looking at the empty track, two long bands of steel that turned to brass far away, in the clear, summer sunset beyond the terminal vaults. She was afraid to look at the clock and learn that which she had feared: that the train was hopelessly, indefinitely late. The platform trembled under the grating wheels of a heavy baggage truck. Somewhere in the long steel tunnel, a voice cried mournfully at regular intervals, the same words that blended into one, like the call of a bird in the dusk: "Grishka shove it over." Boots shuffled lazily, aimlessly past her. Across the tracks a woman sat on a bundle, her head drooping. The glass panes above were turning a desolate orange. The voice called plaintively: "Grishka shove it over. . . ."

When Kira went to the office of the station commandant, the executive answered briskly that the train would be quite late; unavoidable delay; a misunderstanding at a junction; the train was not expected till tomorrow morning.

She stood on the platform for a little while longer, aimlessly, reluctant to leave the place where she had almost felt his presence. Then she walked out slowly, walked down the stairs, her arms limp, her feet lingering unsteadily on every step she descended.

Far down at the end of the street, the sky was a flat band of

bright, pure, motionless yellow, like the spilled yoke of an egg, and the street looked brown and wide in a warm twilight. She walked away slowly.

She saw a familiar corner, passed it, then came back and swerved into another direction, toward the house of the Du-naevs. She had an evening that had to be filled.

Irina opened the door. Her hair was wild, uncombed, but she wore a new dress of black and white striped batiste, and her tired face was powdered neatly.

"Well, Kira! Of all people! What a rare surprise! Come in. Take your coat off. I have something—someone—to show you. And how do you like my new dress?"

Kira was laughing suddenly. She took off her coat: she wore a new dress of black and white striped batiste. Irina gasped: "Oh . . . oh, hell! When did you get it?"

"About a week ago."

"I thought that if I got the plain stripes, I wouldn't see so many of them around, but the first time I wore it, I met three ladies in the same dress, within fifteen minutes. . . . Oh, what's the use? . . . Oh, well, come on!"

In the dining room the windows were open, and the room felt spacious, fresh with the soft clatter of the street. Vasili Ivanovitch got up hastily, smiling, dropping tools and a piece of wood on the table. Victor rose gracefully, bowing. A tall, blond, husky young man jumped up and stood stiffly, while Irina announced: "Two little twins from the Soviet reformatory! . . . Kira, may I present Sasha Chernov? Sasha—my cousin, Kira Argounova."

Sasha's hand was big and firm, and his handshake too strong. He grinned shyly, a timid, candid, disarming grin.

"Sasha, this is a rare treat for you," said Irina. "A rare guest. The recluse of Pctrograd."

"Of Leningrad," Victor corrected.

"Of Pctrograd," Irina repeated. "How are you, Kira? I hate to admit how glad I am to see you."

"I'm delighted to meet you," Sasha muttered. "I've heard so much about you."

"Without a doubt," said Victor, "Kira is the most talked about woman in the city—and even in Party circles." Kira glanced at him sharply; but he was smiling pleasantly: "Glamorous women have always been an irresistible theme for admiring whispers. Like Madame de Pompadour, for instance. Charm refutes the Marxist theory: it knows no class distinctions."

"Shut up," said Irina. "I don't know what you're talking about, but I'm sure it's something rotten."

"Not at all," said Kira quietly, holding Victor's eyes, "Victor is very complimentary, even though he does exaggerate."

Awkwardly, diffidently, Sasha moved a chair for Kira, offering it to her silently with a wave of his hand and a helpless grin.

"Sasha is studying history," said Irina, "that is, he was. He's been thrown out of the University for trying to think in a country of free thought."

"I will have you understand, Irina," said Victor, "that I won't tolerate such remarks in my presence. I expect the Party to be respected."

"Oh, stop acting!" Irina snapped. "The Party Collective won't hear you."

Kira noticed Sasha's long, silent glance at Victor; Sasha's steely blue eyes were neither bashful nor friendly.

"I'm sorry about the University, Sasha," said Kira, feeling suddenly that she liked him.

"I did not mind it," Sasha drawled in a quiet, measured tone of conviction. "It, really, was not essential. There are some outward circumstances which an autocratic power can control. There are some values it can never reach nor subjugate."

"You will discover, Kira," Victor smiled coldly, "that you and Sasha have much in common. You are both inclined to disregard the rudiments of caution."

"Victor, will you . . ." Vasili Ivanovitch began.

"Father, I have a right to expect, as long as I'm feeding this family, that my views . . ."

"You're feeding whom?" a shrill voice asked from the next room. Acia appeared on the threshold, her stockings loose around her ankles, the shreds of a torn magazine in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other. "I wish someone'd feed someone. I'm still hungry and Irina wouldn't give me a second helping of soup."

"Father, I expect something to be done about this child," said Victor. "She's growing up like a bum. If she were to join a children's organization, such as the Pioneers . . ."

"Victor, we won't discuss that again," Vasili Ivanovitch interrupted firmly, quietly.

"Who wants to be a stinking Pioneer?" asked Acia.

"Acia, you go back to your room," Irina ordered, "or I'll put you to bed."

"You and who else?" stated Acia, disappearing behind a slammed door.

"Really," Victor observed, "if I'm able to ~~study~~ ~~work~~ ~~besides~~ and provide for this household, I don't see why Irina can't take proper care of one ~~trial~~."

No one answered.

Vasili Ivanovitch bent over the piece of wood he had been carving. Irina drew pictures with a spoon handle on the old table cloth. Victor rose to his feet: "Sorry, Kira, to ~~be~~ ~~so~~ ~~late~~ ~~such~~ a rare guest, but I have to go. I have a dinner ~~engagement~~."

"Sure," said Irina. "See that the hostess doesn't ~~borrow~~ ~~any~~ silverware from Kira's room."

Victor left. Kira noticed that the tools were trembling in Vasili Ivanovitch's wrinkled fingers.

"What are you doing, Uncle Vasili?"

"Making a frame," Vasili Ivanovitch raised his head, ~~showing~~ his work proudly, "for one of Irina's pictures. They're good pictures. It's a shame to let them get crumpled and ruined in a drawer."

"It's beautiful, Uncle Vasili. I didn't know you could do that."

"Oh, I used to be good at it. I haven't done it for years. But I used to be good in the . . . in the old days, when I was a young man, in Siberia."

"How's your job, Uncle Vasili?"

"No more," said Irina. "How long do you think one can keep a job in a private store?"

"What happened?"

"Haven't you heard? They closed the store for back taxes. And the boss, himself, is now more broke than we are. . . . Would you like some tea, Kira? I'll fix it. The tenants stole our Primus, but Sasha will help me to light the samovar in the kitchen. Come on!" she threw at him imperiously, and Sasha rose obediently. "I don't know why I ask him to help," she winked at Kira, "he's the most helpless, useless, awkward thing born." But her eyes were sparkling happily. She took his arm and wheeled him out of the room.

It was growing dark, and the open window was a sharp, bright blue. Vasili Ivanovitch did not light a lamp. He bent lower over his carving.

"Sasha is a nice boy," he said suddenly, "and I'm worried."

"Why?" asked Kira.

He whispered: "Politics. Secret societies. Poor doomed little fool."

"And Victor suspects?"

"I think so."

It was Irina who switched on the light, returning with a sparkling tray of cups, preceding Sasha with a steaming samovar.

"Here's the tea. And some cookies. I made them. See how you like them, Kira, for an artist's cooking."

"How's the art, Irina?"

"The job, you mean? Oh, I still have it. But I'm afraid I'm not too good at drawing posters. I've been reprimanded twice in the Wall Newspaper. They said my peasant women looked like cabaret dancers and my workers were too graceful. My bourgeois ideology, you know. Well, what do they want? It's not my specialty. I could scream, sometimes, I can't get any ideas at all for one more of those damn posters."

"And now they have that competition," Vasili Ivanovitch said mournfully.

"What competition?"

Irina spilled tea on the table cloth. "An inter-club competition. Who'll make the most, the best and the reddest posters. Have to work two hours extra every day—free—for the glory of the Club."

"Under the Soviets," drawled Sasha, "there is no exploitation."

"I thought," said Irina, "that I had a good idea for a winner: a real proletarian wedding—a worker and a peasant woman on a tractor, God damn them! But I heard that the Club of Red Printers is making a symbolic one—the union of an airplane and a tractor—sort of the spirit of Electrification and Proletarian State Construction."

"And the wages," sighed Vasili Ivanovitch. "She spent all of her last month's salary on shoes for Acia."

"Well," said Irina, "she couldn't go barefooted."

"Irina, you work too hard," Sasha remarked, "and you take the work too seriously. Why waste your nerves? It's all temporary."

"It is," said Vasili Ivanovitch.

"I hope it is," said Kira.

"Sasha's my life-saver," Irina's weary mouth smiled tremulously and sarcastically at once, as if trying to deny the involuntary tenderness in her voice. "He took me to the theater last week. And week before last, we went to the Museum of Alexander III, and we wandered there for hours, looking at the paintings."

"Leo's coming back tomorrow," Kira said suddenly, irrelevantly, as if she could not keep it any longer.

"Oh!" Irina's spoon clattered down. "You never told us. I'm so glad! And he's quite well?"

"Yes. He was to return tonight, but the train is late."

"How is his aunt in Berlin?" asked Vasili Ivanovitch. "Still helping you? There's an example of family loyalty. I have the greatest admiration for that lady, even though I've never seen her. Anyone who's safe, away, free and can still understand us, buried alive in this Soviet graveyard, must be a wonderful person. She's saved Leo's life."

"Uncle Vasili," said Kira, "when you see Leo, will you remember never to mention it? His aunt's help, I mean. You remember I explained to you how sensitive he is about being under obligation to her, and so we'll all be careful not to remind him of it, will we?"

"Certainly, I understand, child. Don't worry. . . . But that's Europe for you. That's abroad. That's what a human life does to a human being. I think it's hard for us to understand kindness and what used to be called ethics. We're all turning into beasts in a beastly struggle. But we'll be saved. We'll be saved before it gets us all."

"We don't have long to wait," said Sasha.

Kira noticed a frightened, pleading look in Irina's eyes.

It was late when Kira and Sasha rose to go. He lived far on the other side of the city, but he offered to escort her home, for the streets were dark. He wore an old coat and he walked fast, slouching. They hurried together through a soft, transparent twilight, through the city full of the fragrance of a warm earth somewhere far under the pavements and cobblestones.

"Irina isn't happy," he said suddenly.

"No," said Kira, "she isn't. No one is."

"We're living in difficult times. But things will change. Things are changing. There still are men to whom freedom is more than a word on posters."

"Do you think they have a chance, Sasha?"

His voice was low, tense with a passionate conviction, a quiet strength that made her wonder why she had ever thought him bashful: "Do you think the Russian worker is a beast that licks its yoke while his mind is being battered out of him? Do you think he's fooled by the clatter of a very noise of tyrants? Do you know what he reads? Do you know the books that are hidden in the factories? The papers that pass secretly through many hands? Do you know that the p-

"Sasha," she interrupted, "aren't you playing a very dangerous game?"

He did not answer. He looked at the old roofs of the city against a milky, bluish sky.

"The people," she said, "has claimed too many victims already—of your kind."

"Russia has a long revolutionary history," he said. "They know it. They're even teaching it in their schools, but they think it's ended. It isn't. It's just beginning. And it has never lacked men who did not think of the danger. In the Czar's days—or at any other time."

She stopped and looked at him in the dusk, and said desperately, forgetting that she had met him for the first time but a few hours ago: "Oh, Sasha, is it worth the chance you're taking?"

He towered over her, strands of blond hair sticking out from under his old cap, his mouth grinning slowly over the raised collar of his coat. "You mustn't worry, Kira. And Irina mustn't worry. I'm not in danger. They won't get me. They won't have the time."

*

In the morning, Kira had to go to work.

She had insisted on working; Andrei had found a job for her—the job of lecturer and excursion guide in the Museum of the Revolution. The job consisted of sitting at home and waiting for a call from the Excursion Center. When they called, she hurried to the Museum and led a group of bewildered people through the halls of what had been the Winter Palace. She received a few rubles for each excursion; she was listed as a Soviet employee by the Upravdom of her house; it saved her from an exorbitant rent and from the suspicion of being bourgeois.

In the morning, she had telephoned the Nikolaevsky station; the train from the Crimea was not expected until early in the afternoon. Then the Excursion Center called her; she had to go.

The halls of the Winter Palace displayed faded photographs of revolutionary leaders, yellowed proclamations, maps, diagrams, models of Czarist prisons, rusty guns, splinters of leg irons. Thirty workers were waiting in the Palace lobby for the "comrade guide." They were on vacation, but their Educational Club had arranged the excursion and they could not ignore its command. They removed their caps respectfully,

It was an hour later that she heard steps behind the door, and the door was thrown open without a knock. The first thing she saw was a dusty suitcase. Then she saw the smile, the drooping lips arched over very white teeth in a tanned face. Then she stood with the back of her hand at her mouth and could not move.

He said: "Allo, Kira."

She did not kiss him. Her hands fell on his shoulders and moved down his arms, all her weight in her fingers, for she was sagging suddenly and her face was sliding slowly down his chest, down the cloth of his coat; and as he tried to lift her head, she pressed her mouth to his hand and held it; her shoulders jerked; she was sobbing.

"Kira, you little fool!"

He was laughing softly; his fingers caressed her hair; the fingers were trembling. He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the armchair, and sat down, holding her on his lap, forcing her lips to meet his.

"And that's the strong Kira who never cries. You shouldn't be so glad to see me, Kira. . . . Stop it, Kira. . . . You little fool. . . . My dearest, dearest . . ."

She tried to get up: "Leo. . . . You must take your coat off and . . ."

"Stay still."

He held her, and she leaned back, and she felt suddenly that she had no strength to lift her arms, that she had no strength ever to move again; and the Kira who despised femininity, smiled a tender, radiant, trusting smile, weaker than a woman's, the smile of a lost, bewildered child, her lashes heavy and sparkling with tears.

He looked at her, his eyes half-closed, and his glance was insulting in its open, mocking understanding of his power, a glance more voluptuous than a lover's caress.

Then he turned away and asked: "Was it terribly hard for you—this winter?"

"A little. But we don't have to talk about it. It's past. Do you cough any more, Leo?"

"No."

"And you're well? Quite, quite, completely well? Free to live again?"

"I am well—yes. As to living again. . . ."

He shrugged. His face was tanned, his arms were strong, his cheeks were not hollow any longer; but she noticed some-

III

In the afternoon, three days later, the door bell rang and Kira went to answer it.

She threw the door half-open, protected by a chain. On the stair-landing stood a heavy woman in a smart, expensive overcoat. Her face, slanting back from a prominent, pointed chin, was raised with a studied movement of graceful inquiry, revealing a stout, white neck; her full lips, smeared with a violent magenta, were half-open, revealing strong white teeth. Her hand poised on a broad expanse of green silk scarf, she drawled in a self-consciously gracious voice: "Does Leo Kovalensky live here?"

Kira looked incredulously at the diamond rings sparkling on the short, white fingers. She answered: "Why . . . yes."

She did not remove the chain; she stood staring at the woman. The woman said with a little accent of gentle firmness: "I want to see him."

Kira let her enter. The woman looked at Kira curiously, inquisitively, narrowing her eyes.

Leo rose with a surprised frown when they entered the room. The woman extended both hands to him in a dramatic greeting. "Leo! So delightful to see you again! I've remembered my threat to find you. I really intend to be a nuisance!"

Leo did not smile in answer to her expectant giggle; he bowed graciously; he said: "Kira, this is Antonina Pavlovna Platoshkina—Kira Alexandrovna Argounova."

"Oh! . . . *Argounova*? . . . Oh . . ." said Antonina Pavlovna, as if noting the fact that Kira's name was not Leo's; she sounded almost relieved. She extended her arm, in a straight line, her fingers drooping, as if she were giving her hand to a man and expecting him to kiss it.

"Antonina Pavlovna and I were neighbors in the sanatorium," Leo explained.

"And he was a perfectly ungracious neighbor, I must complain," Antonina Pavlovna laughed huskily. "He wouldn't wait for me—and I wanted so much to leave on the same train. And, Leo, you didn't give me your apartment number and I

had a perfectly terrible time trying to get it out of the Upravdom. Upravdoms are one of the unavoidable nuisances of our era, and all we of the intelligentsia can do is bear with it with a sense of humor."

She took off her coat. She wore a plain black dress of new, expensive silk in the latest fashion, and foreign earrings of green celluloid circles. Her hair was combed back severely off her forehead and two trim, sleek coils were flattened against her cheeks smeared with a very white powder. Her hair was an incredible orange, the color of a magnificent string of amber that swung like a pendulum, striking her stomach, when she moved. Her dress fitted tightly, slanting sharply from very wide hips down to heavy legs with very thin ankles and very small feet that seemed crushed under their disproportionate burden. She sat down and her stomach settled in a wide fold over her lap.

"When did you return, Tonia?" Leo asked.

"Yesterday. And oh, what a trip!" she sighed. "These Soviet trains! Really, I believe I lost everything I accomplished in the sanatorium. I was taking a rest cure for my nerves," she explained, pointing her chin at Kira. "And what sensitive person isn't a nervous wreck these days? But the Crimea! That place saved my life."

"It was beautiful," Leo agreed.

"But, really, it lost all its charm after you left, Leo. You know, he was the most charming patient in that dull sanatorium and everybody admired him so much—oh, purely platonically, my dear, if you're worried," she winked at Kira.

"I'm not," said Kira.

"Leo was so kind as to help me with my French lessons. I was learning . . . that is, brushing up on my French. It is such a relief, in these drab days, to stumble upon a person like Leo. You must forgive me, Leo. I realize that I may be an unwelcome guest, but it would be too much to expect of a woman if you asked her to give up a beautiful friendship in this revolting city where real people are so rare!"

"Why, no, Tonia, I'm glad you took the trouble to find me."

"Ah, these people here! I know so many of them. We meet, we talk, we shake hands. What does it mean? Nothing. Nothing but an empty physical gesture. Who among them knows the deeper significance of the spirit or the real meaning of our lives?"

Leo's slow, faint smile was not one of understanding, but he

said: "One could forget one's troubles in some engrossing activity—if it were permitted these days."

"How profoundly true! Of course, the modern woman of culture is organically incapable of remaining inactive. I have a tremendous program outlined for myself for this coming winter. I'm going to study. I propose to master ancient Egypt."

"What?" asked Kira.

"Ancient Egypt," said Antonina Pavlovna. "I want to recapture its spirit in all its entirety. There is a profound significance in these far-away cultures, a mysterious bond with the present, which we moderns do not appreciate fully. I am certain that in a former incarnation . . . You are not interested in theosophy, are you, Leo?"

"No."

"I can appreciate your viewpoint, of course, but I have given it a thorough study and a great deal of thought. There is a transcendental truth in it, an explanation for so many of the baffling phenomena of our existence. Of course, I have one of those natures that long for the mystical. However, you must not think me old-fashioned. You mustn't be surprised if I tell you that I'm studying political economy."

"You are, Tonia? Why?"

"One cannot be out of tune with one's time, you know. To criticize, we must understand. I find it surprisingly thrilling. There is a certain peculiar romance in labor and markets and machines. Apropos, have you read the latest volume of verse by Valentina Sirkina?"

"No, I haven't."

"Thoroughly delightful. Such depth of emotion, and yet—completely modern, so essentially modern! There is a verse about—how does it go?—about my heart is asbestos that remains cool over the blast-furnace of my emotions—or something like that—it is really superb."

"I must admit I don't read modern poets."

"I'll bring you that book, Leo. I know you'll understand and appreciate it. And I'm sure Kira Alexandrovna will enjoy it."

"Thank you," said Kira, "but I never read poetry."

"Indeed? How peculiar! I'm sure you care for music?"

"Fox-trots," said Kira.

"Really?" Antonina Pavlovna smiled condescendingly. When she smiled, her chin pointed further forward and her forehead slanted back; her lips opened slowly, uncomfortably, as if slithering apart. "Speaking of music," she turned to Leo,

"it is another essential item on my winter's program. I've made Koko promise me a box for every concert at the State Philharmony. Poor Koko! He's really very artistic at heart, if one knows how to approach him, but I'm afraid that his unfortunate early upbringing has not trained him for an appreciation of symphonic music. I shall, probably, have to be alone in my box. Oh—here's a happy thought!—you may share it with me, Leo. . . . And Kira Alexandrovna, of course," she nodded to Kira and turned to Leo again.

"Thank you, Tonia," he answered, "but I'm afraid we won't have much time for that, this winter."

"Leo, my dear!" she spread her arms in a wide gesture of sympathy, "don't you think I understand? Your financial position is. . . . Ah, these are not times for men like you. However, do not lose courage. With my connections . . . Koko cannot refuse me anything. He hated to see me leave for the Crimea. He missed me so much—you wouldn't believe how glad he was to see me back. He could not be more devoted if he were my husband. In fact, he couldn't be as devoted as he is. Marriage is an outmoded prejudice—as you know." She smiled at Kira.

"I'm sure the Crimea has helped your health," Leo said hastily, coldly.

"Ah, there's no other place like it! It is a bit of paradise. The dark, velvet sky, the diamond stars, the sea and the thin moonlight! You know, I've wondered why you remained so different to its magic spell. I thought you were essentially romantic. Of course, I can understand the attraction."

She threw a swift glance at Kira. The glance was seized and held by Kira's fixed eyes. Then Antonina's lips slithered into a cold smile and the corners of her eyes. "You men are strange creatures. To understand the science in itself and the first duty of a man, he must master it thoroughly in the first instance. . . . She sighed wearily, with a depressing tone. "The heroic officers of the White Army, the commissars." She laughed shrilly. "Not? We are all modern here who misunderstood me. But I am not. You know—noblesse oblige."

Kira sat on the arm of a chair, her feet in slippers, studying her fingernails. She looked beyond the window, where the moonlight shone on the diamond-studded pavement.

"Oh, how late it is! It's been so delightful that I haven't noticed the time at all. I must hurry home. Koko is probably getting melancholy without me, the poor child."

She opened her bag, took out a little mirror and, holding it delicately in two straight fingers, inspected her face carefully through narrowed eyes. She took out a little scarlet bottle with a tiny brush and smeared a purplish blot over her lips.

"Delightful stuff," she explained, showing the bottle to Kira, "infinitely better than lipstick. I notice you don't use much lipstick, Kira Alexandrovna. I would recommend it strongly. As woman to woman, one should never neglect one's appearance, you know. Particularly," she laughed, a friendly, intimate laughter, "particularly when one has such valuable property to guard."

At the door in the lobby, Antonina Pavlovna turned to Leo: "Don't worry about this coming winter, Leo. With my connections . . . Koko, of course, knows the highest . . . why, I'd be afraid to whisper some of the names he knows and . . . of course, Koko is putty in my hands. You must meet him, Leo. We can do a lot for you. I shall see to it that a magnificent young man like you is not lost in this Soviet swamp."

"Thank you, Tonia. I appreciate your offer. But I hope that I'm not quite lost—yet."

"Just what is his position?" Kira asked suddenly.

"Koko? He's assistant manager of the Food Trust—officially," Antonina Pavlovna winked mysteriously with a brief chuckle, lowering her voice; then, waving a hand with a diamond that flashed a swift spark in the light of an electric bulb, she drawled: "*Au revoir, mes amis*. I shall see you soon."

Slamming the chain over the door, Kira gasped: "Leo, I'm surprised!"

"By what?"

"That you can be acquainted with such an unspeakable . . ."

"I do not presume to criticize your friends."

They were passing through Marisha's room. In a corner by the window, Marisha raised her head from her book and looked at Leo curiously, startled by the tone of his voice. They crossed the room and Leo slammed the door behind them.

"You could have been civil, at least," he stated.

"What do you mean?"

"You could have said a couple of words—every other hour."

"She didn't come to hear me talk."

"I didn't invite her. And she's not a friend of mine. You didn't have to be so tragic about it."

"But, Leo, where did you pick that up?"

"That was in the same sanatorium and it happened to have foreign books, which is a rare treat when you have to spend your days reading Soviet trash. That's how we got acquainted. What's wrong with that?"

"But, Leo, don't you see what she's after?"

"Of course I do. Are you really afraid she'll get it?"

"Leo!"

"Well, then, why can't I speak to her? She's a harmless fool who's trying to amount to something. And she really does have connections."

"But to associate with that type of person. . . ."

"She's no worse than the Red trash one has to associate with, these days. And, at least, she's not Red."

"Well, as you wish."

"Oh, forget it, Kira. She'll never come again."

He was smiling at her, suddenly, warmly, his eyes bright, as if nothing had happened, and she surrendered, her hands on his shoulders, whispering: "Leo, don't you see? Nothing of that type should even dare to look at you."

He laughed, patting her cheek: "Let her look. It won't hurt me."

*

Leo had said: "Write to your uncle in Budapest at once. Thank him and tell him not to send us money any longer. I'm well. We'll struggle on our own. I have written down the exact sum of everything you sent me. Have you kept track of what you spent here, as I asked? We'll have to start repaying him—if he's patient, for the devil alone knows how long it will take."

She had whispered: "Yes, Leo," without looking at him.

He had noticed her gold wristwatch and frowned: "Where did that come from?"

She had said: "It's a present. From . . . Andrei Taganov."

"Oh, really? So you're accepting presents from him?"

"Leo!" She had whirled upon him defiantly, then she had pleaded: "Why not, Leo? It was my birthday and I couldn't hurt his feelings."

He had shrugged contemptuously: "Oh, I don't mind. It's your own business. Personally, I wouldn't feel comfortable wearing something paid for with G.P.U. money."

She had hidden the cigarette lighter, and the silk stockings, and the perfume. She had told Leo that the red dress had been

made for his return. He wondered why she did not like to wear it.

She spent most of her days in the halls of the Winter Palace, saying to the gaping excursionists: ". . . and it is the duty of every conscientious citizen to be acquainted with the history of our revolutionary movement in order to become a trained, enlightened fighter in the ranks of the World Revolution—our highest goal."

In the evenings, she tried to tell Leo: "I have to go out tonight. I've promised Irina . . ." or: "I really must go out tonight. It's a meeting of Excursion Workers." But he made her stay at home.

She looked into the mirror, sometimes, and wondered about the eyes people had told her were so clear, so honest.

She did not go out at night. She could not tear herself away. She could not satisfy the hunger of looking at him, of sitting silently, huddled in an armchair, watching him move across the room. She would watch the lines of his body as he stood at a window, turned away from her, his hands spread on his waistline, holding his back, his body leaning lightly backward against his hands, one tense, sunburned muscle of his neck showing under dark, dishevelled hair, thrilling as a suggestion, a promise of his face which she could not see. Then she would rise and walk hesitantly toward him and let her hand run slowly down the hard tendon of his neck, without a word, without a kiss.

Then she could think, with a cold wonder, of another man who was waiting for her somewhere.

But she knew that she had to see Andrei. One evening, she put on the red dress and told Leo that she had promised to call on her family.

"May I go with you?" he asked. "I haven't seen them since my return and I owe them a visit."

"No, not this time, Leo," she answered calmly. "I'd rather you wouldn't. Mother is . . . she's so changed . . . I know you won't get along with her."

"Do you have to go tonight, Kira? I hate to let you go and to stay here alone. I've been without you for such a long time."

"I've promised them I'd come tonight. I won't stay late. I'll be back soon."

She was putting on her coat when the door bell rang.

It was Marisha who went to open the door and they heard Galina Petrovna's voice sweeping through the room, approach-

ing: "Well, I'm glad they're home. Well, if I thought they were visiting others and neglecting their old parents and . . ."

Galina Petrovna entered first; Lydia followed; Alexander Dimitrievitch shuffled in behind them.

"Leo, my dear child!" Galina Petrovna swept toward him and kissed him on both cheeks. "I'm so glad to see you! Welcome back to Leningrad."

Lydia shook hands limply; she removed her old hat, sat down heavily, as if collapsing, and fumbled with her hairpins: a long strand of hair was falling loosely out of the careless roll at the back of her neck. She was very pale and used no powder; her nose was shiny; she stared mournfully at the floor.

Alexander Dimitrievitch muttered: "I'm glad you're well, my boy," and patted Leo's shoulder uncertainly, with the timid, frightened look of an animal expecting to be hurt.

Kira faced them calmly and said with cold assurance: "Why did you come? I was just starting for your house, as I promised."

"As you . . ." Galina Petrovna began, but Kira interrupted:

"Well, since you're here, take your coats off."

"I'm so happy you're well again, Leo," said Galina Petrovna. "I feel as if you were my son. You really are my son. Everything else is just bourgeois prejudices."

"Mother!" Lydia remonstrated feebly, hopelessly.

Galina Petrovna settled down in a comfortable ~~armchair~~. Alexander Dimitrievitch sat apologetically on the edge of a chair by the door.

"Thank you for coming," Leo smiled graciously. "My only excuse for neglecting to call, as I should have, is . . ."

"Kira," Galina Petrovna finished for him. "Do you know that we haven't seen her more than three times ~~while you were away?~~"

"I have a letter for you, Kira," Lydia said ~~secretly~~.

"A letter?" Kira's voice jerked slightly.

"Yes. It came today."

There was no return address on the envelope ~~in the letter~~ the handwriting. She threw the letter ~~indifferently~~ on the table.

"Don't you want to open it?" Leo asked.

"No hurry," she said evenly. "Nothing ~~important~~."

"Well, Leo?" Galina Petrovna's voice ~~became~~ had become louder, clearer. "What are you ~~going to do~~ winter? This is such an interesting year ~~with so many~~ many opportunities, particularly for the young."

"So many . . . what?" Leo asked.

"Such a wide field of activity! It's not like in the dying, decadent cities of Europe where people slave all their lives for measly wages and a pitiful little existence. Here—each one of us has an opportunity to be a useful, creative member of a stupendous whole. Here—one's work is not merely a wasted effort to satisfy one's petty hunger, but a contribution to the gigantic building of humanity's future."

"Mother," Kira asked, "who wrote all that down for you?"

"Really, Kira," Galina Petrovna drew her shoulders up, "you're not only impertinent to your mother, but I think you're also a bad influence on Leo's future."

"I wouldn't worry about that, Galina Petrovna," said Leo.

"And of course, Leo, I hope that you're modern enough to outlive the prejudices we've all shared. We must admit that the Soviet Government is the only progressive government in the world. It utilizes all its human resources. Even an old person like me, who has been useless all her life, can find an opportunity for creative toil. And as for young people like you . . ."

"Where are you working, Galina Petrovna?" Leo asked.

"Oh, don't you know? I'm teaching in a Labor School—they used to be called High Schools, you know. Sewing and fancy needlework. We all realize that a practical subject like sewing is much more important to our little future citizens than the dead, useless things, such as Latin, which were taught in the old bourgeois days. And our methods? We're centuries ahead of Europe. For instance, take the complex method that we're . . ."

"Mother," Lydia said wearily, "Leo may not be interested."

"Nonsense! Leo is a modern young man. Now, this method we're using at present. . . . For instance, what did they do in the old days? The children had to memorize mechanically so many dry, disjointed subjects—history, physics, arithmetic—with no connection between them at all. What do we do now? We have the complex method. Take last week, for instance. Our subject was Factory. So every teacher had to build his course around that central subject. In the history class they taught the growth and development of factories; in the physics class they taught all about machinery; the arithmetic teacher gave them problems about production and consumption; in the art class they drew factory interiors. And in my class—we made overalls and blouses. Don't you see the advantage of the method? The indelible impression it will leave in the children's

minds? Overalls and blouses—practical, concrete, instead of teaching them a lot of dry, theoretical seams and stitches."

Lydia's head drooped listlessly; she had heard it all many times.

"I'm glad you're enjoying your work, Galina Petrovna," said Leo.

"I'm glad you get your rations," said Kira.

"I do, indeed," Galina Petrovna stated proudly. "Of course, our distribution of commodities has not as yet reached a level of perfection and, really, the sunflower-seed oil I got last week was so rancid we couldn't use it . . . but then, this is a transitional period of . . ."

". . . State Construction!" Alexander Dimitrievitch yelled suddenly, hastily, as a well-memorized lesson.

"And what are you doing, Alexander Dimitrievitch?" Leo asked.

"Oh, I'm working!" Alexander Dimitrievitch jerked as if ready to jump forward, as if defending himself hastily against a dangerous accusation. "Yes, I'm working. I'm a Soviet employee. I am."

"Of course," Galina Petrovna drawled, "Alexander's position is not as responsible as mine. He's a bookkeeper in a district office somewhere way on the Vasilievsky Island—such a long trip every day!—and just what kind of an office is it, Alexander? But, anyway, he does have a bread card—though he doesn't get enough even for himself alone."

"But I'm working," Alexander Dimitrievitch said meekly.

"Of course," said Galina Petrovna, "I get better rations than you because I'm in a preferred class of pedagogues. I'm not just socially. Why, do you know, Leo, that I've been assistant secretary of the Teachers' Council? It is quite important that the present regime appreciates qualities of character. I even gave a speech on the methodology of teaching at an inter-club meeting where Lydia gave a performance so beautifully."

"Sure," Lydia said mournfully. "I'm working, too. Musical director of the Club. A pound of bread a week. No money, what's left after the expenses?"

"Lydia is not pliable," said Kira.

"But I play the 'Internationale' at the funeral march—'You fall as I fall'—even got applauded when I sang it at the meeting where mother made the speech."

Kira rose wearily to make tea. She pumped the Primus and put the kettle on, and watched it thoughtfully—and through the hissing of the flame, Galina Petrovna's voice boomed loudly, rhythmically, as if addressing a class: "... yes, twice, imagine? Two honorable mentions in our students' Wall Newspaper, as one of the three most modern and conscientious pedagogues. . . . Yes, I do have some influence. When that insolent young teacher tried to run the school, she was dismissed fast enough. And you can be sure I had something to say about that. . . ."

Kira did not hear the rest. She was watching the letter on the table, wondering. When she heard a voice again, it was Lydia's and it was saying shrilly: "... spiritual consolation. I know. It has been revealed to me. There are secrets beyond our mortal minds. Holy Russia's salvation will come from faith. It has been predicted. Through patience and long suffering shall we redeem our sins. . . ."

Behind the door, Marisha wound her gramophone and played "John Gray." It was a new record and the swift little notes jerked gaily, clicking in sharp, short knocks.

*"John Gray
Was brave and daring,
Kitty
Was very pretty . . ."*

Kira sat, her chin in her hands, the glow of the Primus flame flickering under her nostrils, and she smiled suddenly, very softly, and said: "I like that song."

"That awful, vulgar thing, so overplayed that I'm sick of it?" Lydia gasped.

"Yes. . . . Even if it is overplayed. . . . It has such a nice rhythm . . . clicking . . . like rivets driven into steel. . . ." She was speaking softly, simply, a little helplessly, as she seldom spoke to her family. She raised her head and looked at them, and—they had never seen it before—her eyes were pleading and hurt.

"Still thinking of your engineering, aren't you?" asked Lydia.

"Sometimes . . ." Kira whispered.

"I can't understand what's wrong with you, Kira," Galina Petrovna boomed. "You're never satisfied. You have a perfectly good job, easy and well-paid, and you mope over some child-

Kira dearest,

Please forgive me for writing. But won't you telephone me?

Andrei

*

She led two excursions on the following day. Coming home, she told Leo that she would be dismissed if she did not attend a guides' meeting that evening. She put on her red dress. On the stair-landing, she kissed Leo lightly, as he stood watching her go; she waved to him, vaulting down the stairs, with a cold, gay chuckle. On a street corner, she opened her purse, took out the little French bottle and pressed a few drops of perfume into her hair. She leaped into a tramway at full speed and stood hanging onto a leather strap, watching the lights swim past. When she got off, she walked, lightly, swiftly, with a cold, precise determination, toward the palace that was a Party Club.

She ran soundlessly up the crumbling marble stairway of the pavilion. She knocked sharply at the door.

When Andrei opened the door, she laughed, kissing him: "I know, I know, I know. . . . Don't say it . . . I want to be forgiven first, and then I'll explain."

He whispered happily: "You're forgiven. You don't have to explain."

She did not explain. She did not let him utter a complaint. She whirled around the room, and he tried to catch her, and the cloth of her coat felt cold in his hands, cold and fragrant of summer night air. He could whisper only: "Do you know that it's been two weeks since . . ." But he did not finish the sentence.

Then she noticed that he was dressed for the street. "Were you going out, Andrei?"

"Oh . . . yes, I was, but it's not important."

"Where were you going?"

"Just to a Party Cell meeting."

"A Party Cell meeting? And you say it's not important? But you can't miss that."

"Yes, I can. I'm not going."

"Andrei, I'd rather come tomorrow and let you . . ."

"No."

"Well, then, let's go out together. Take me to the European roof."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. Now."

He did not want to refuse. She did not want to notice the look in his eyes.

They sat at a white table in the roof garden on top of the European Hotel. They sat in a dim corner, and they could see nothing of the long room but the naked white back of a woman a few tables away, with a little strand of golden hair curling at the nape of her neck, escaping from the trim, lustrous waves of her coiffure, with a little golden shadow between her shoulder blades, her long fingers holding a glass with a liquid the color of her hair, swaying slowly; and beyond the woman, beyond a haze of yellow lights and bluish, rippling smoke, an orchestra played fox-trots from "Bajadere," and the violinists swayed to the rhythm of the golden glass.

Andrei said: "It's been two weeks, Kira, and . . . and you probably need it." He slipped a roll of bills into her hand, his monthly salary.

She whispered, pushing it back, closing his fingers over the bills: "No, Andrei. . . . Thank you. . . . But I don't need it. And . . . and I don't think I'll need it again. . . ."

"But . . ."

"You see, I get so many excursions to lead, and mother got more classes at the school, and we all have clothes and everything we need, so that . . ."

"But, Kira, I want you to . . ."

"Please, Andrei! Don't let's argue. Not about that. . . . Please. . . . Keep it. . . . If . . . if I need it, I'll tell you."

"Promise?"

"Yes."

The violins rumbled dully, heavily, and suddenly the music burst out like a firecracker, so that the swift, laughing notes could almost be seen as sparks shooting to the ceiling.

"You know," said Kira, "I shouldn't ask you to bring me here. It's not a place for you. But I like it. It's only a miniature and a very poor little one at that, but still it's a glimpse of what Europe is. Do you know that music they're playing? It's from 'Bajadere.' I saw it. They're playing it in Europe too. Like here . . . almost like here."

"Kira," Andrei asked, "that Leo Kovalensky, is he in love with you or something?"

She looked at him, and the reflection of an electric light stood still as two sparks in her eyes and as a bright line ran on her patent leather collar. "Why do you ask that?"

"I saw your cousin, Victor Dumas, at a club meeting last

he told me that Leo Kovalensky was back, and he smiled as if the news should mean something to me. I didn't even know that Kovalensky had been away."

"Yes, he's back. He's been away somewhere in the Crimea, for his health, I think. I don't know whether he's in love with me, but Victor was in love with me once, and he's never forgiven me for that."

"I see. I don't like that man."

"Victor?"

"Yes. And Leo Kovalensky, too. I hope you don't see him often. I don't trust that type of man."

"Oh, I see him occasionally."

The orchestra had stopped playing.

"Andrei, ask them to play something for me. Something I like. It's called the 'Song of Broken Glass.'"

He watched her as the music burst out again, splattering sparks of sound. It was the gayest music he had ever heard; and he had never seen her look sad; but she sat, motionless, staring helplessly, her eyes forlorn, bewildered.

"It's very beautiful, this music, Kira," he whispered, "why do you look like that?"

"It's something I liked . . . long ago . . . when I was a child. . . . Andrei, did you ever feel as if something had been promised to you in your childhood, and you look at yourself and you think 'I didn't know, then, that this is what would happen to me'—and it's strange, and funny, and a little sad?"

"No, I was never promised anything. There were so many things that I didn't know, then, and it's so strange to be learning them now. . . . You know, the first time I brought you here, I was ashamed to enter. I thought it was no place for a Party man. I thought . . ." he laughed softly, apologetically, "I thought I was making a sacrifice for you. And now I like it."

"Why?"

"Because I like to sit in a place where I have no reason to be, no reason but to sit and look at you across the table. Because I like those lights on your collar. Because you have a very stern mouth—and I like that—but when you listen to that music, your mouth is gay, as if it were listening, too. And all those things, they have no meaning for anyone on earth but me, and when I've lived a life where every hour had to have a purpose, and suddenly I discover what it's like to feel things that have no purpose but myself, and I see suddenly how sacred a purpose that can be, so that I can't even argue, I can't doubt, I can't fight it, and I know, then, that a

life is possible whose only justification is my own joy—then everything, everything else suddenly seems very different to me."

She whispered: "Andrei, you shouldn't talk like that. I feel as if I were taking you away from your own life, from everything that has been your life."

"Don't you want to feel it?"

"But doesn't it frighten you? Don't you think sometimes that it may bring you to a choice you have no right to make?"

He answered with so quiet a conviction that the word sounded light, unconcerned, with a calm beyond earnestness: "No." He leaned toward her across the table, his eyes serene, his voice soft and steady: "Kira, you look frightened. And, really, you know, it's not a serious question. I've never had many questions to face in my life. People create their own questions, because they're afraid to look straight. All you have to do is look straight and see the road, and when you see it, don't sit looking at it—walk. I joined the Party because I knew I was right. I love you because I know I'm right. In a way, you and my work are the same. Things are really very simple."

"Not always, Andrei. You know your road. I don't belong on it."

"That's not in the spirit of what you taught me."

She whispered helplessly: "What did I teach you?"

The orchestra was playing the "Song of Broken Glass." No one sang it. Andrei's voice sounded like the words of that music. He was saying: "You remember, you said once that we had the same root somewhere in both of us, because we both believed in life? It's a rare capacity and it can't be taught. And it can't be explained to those in whom that word—life—doesn't awaken the kind of feeling that a temple does, or a military march, or the statue of a perfect body. It is for that feeling that I joined a Party which, at the time, could lead me only to Siberia. It is for that feeling that I wanted to fight against the most senseless and useless of monsters standing in the way of human life—and that's something we call now humanity's politics. And so my own existence was only the fight and the future. You taught me the present."

She made a desperate attempt. She said slowly, watching him: "Andrei, when you told me you loved me, for the first time, you were hungry. I wanted to satisfy that hunger."

"And that's all?"

"That's all."

He laughed quietly, so quietly that she had to give up. "You don't know what you're saying, Kira. Women like you don't love *only* like that."

"What are women like me?"

"What temples are, and military marches, and . . ."

"Let's have a drink, Andrei."

"*You* want a drink?"

"Yes. Now."

"All right."

He ordered the drinks. He watched the glow of the glass at her lips, a long, thin, shivering line of liquid light between fingers that looked golden in its reflection. He said: "Let's drink a toast to something I could never offer but in a place like this: to my life."

"Your new life?"

"My only one."

"Andrei, what if you lose it?"

"I can't lose it."

"But so many things can happen. I don't want to hold your life in my hands."

"But you're holding it."

"Andrei, you must think . . . once in a while . . . that it's possible that . . . What if anything should happen to me?"

"Why think about it?"

"But it's possible."

She felt suddenly as if the words of his answer were the links of a chain she would never be able to break: "It's also possible for every one of us to have to face a death sentence some day. Does it mean that we have to prepare for it?"

IV

They left the roof garden early, and Kira asked Andrei to take her home; she was tired; she did not look at him.

He said: "Certainly, dearest," and called a cab, and let her sit silently, her head on his shoulder, while he held her hand and kept silent, not to disturb her.

He left her at her parents' house. She waited on a dark stair-landing and heard his cab driving away; she waited

longer; for ten minutes, she stood in the darkness, leaning against a cold glass pane; beyond the pane there was a narrow airshaft and a bare brick wall with one window; in the window, a yellow candle shivered convulsively and the huge shadow of a woman's arm kept rising and falling, senselessly, monotonously.

After ten minutes, Kira walked downstairs and hurried to a tramway.

Passing through Marisha's room, she heard a stranger's voice behind the door of her own room, a slow, deep, drawling voice that paused carefully, meticulously on every letter "o" and then rolled on as if on buttered hinges. She threw the door open.

The first person she saw was Antonina Pavlovna in a green brocaded turban, pointing her chin forward inquisitively; then she saw Leo; then she saw the man with the drawling voice—and her eyes froze, while he lumbered up, throwing at her a swift glance of appraisal and suspicion.

"Well, Kira, I thought you were spending the night with the excursion guides. And you said you'd be back early," Leo greeted her sharply, while Antonina Pavlovna drawled:

"Good evening, Kira Alexandrovna."

"I'm sorry. I got away as soon as I could," Kira answered, her eyes staring at the stranger's face.

"Kira, may I present? Karp Karpovitch Morozov—Kira Alexandrovna Argounova."

She did not notice that Karp Karpovitch's big fist was shaking her hand. She was looking at his face. His face had large blond freckles, light, narrow eyes, a heavy red mouth and a short nose with wide, vertical nostrils. She had seen it twice before; she remembered the speculator of the Nikolaevsky station, the food trader of the market.

She stood without removing her coat, without saying a word, cold with a feeling of sudden, inexplicable panic.

"What's the matter, Kira?" Leo asked.

"Leo, haven't we met Citizen Morozov before?"

"I don't believe so."

"Never had the pleasure, Kira Alexandrovna," Morozov drawled, his eyes at once shrewd and naïve and complacently friendly.

While Kira was removing her coat slowly, he turned to Leo: "And the store, Lev Sergeievitch, we'll have it in the neighborhood of the Kouznetzky market. Best neighborhood. I have my eyes on a vacant store—j... .."

window, narrow room—not many square meters to pay for—and I slipped a couple of tens to the Upravdom, and he'll let us have a good, big basement thrown in—just what we need. I can take you there tomorrow, you'll be most pleased.”

Kira's coat dropped to the floor. A lamp stood on the table; in its glow, she could see Morozov's face leaning toward Leo's, his slow words muffled on his heavy lips to a sly, guilty whisper. She stared at Leo. He was not looking at her; his eyes were cold, widened slightly by a strange eagerness. She stood in the semi-darkness, beyond the circle of lamp light. The men paid no attention to her. Antonina Pavlovna threw a slow, expressionless glance at her and turned to the table, flicking ashes off her cigarette.

“How's the Upravdom?” Leo asked.

“Couldn't be better,” Morozov chuckled. “A friendly fellow, easy-going and . . . practical. A few ten-ruble bills and some vodka once in a while—with careful handling, he won't cost us much. I told him to have the store cleaned for you. And we'll order new signs—‘Lev Kovalensky. Food Products.’”

“What are you talking about?” Kira threw the words at Morozov with the violence of a slap in the face. She stood over him, the lamp light scattering broken shadows across her face. Morozov leaned away from her, closer to the table, startled.

“It's a little business deal we're discussing, Kira Alexandrovna,” he explained in a soft, conciliating drawl.

“I've promised you that Koko would do a great deal for Leo,” Antonina Pavlovna smiled.

“Kira, I'll explain later,” Leo said slowly. The words were a command.

Silently, she pulled a chair to the table and sat facing Morozov, leaning forward on her crossed elbows. Morozov continued, trying not to look at her fixed eyes that seemed to register his every word: “You understand the advantage of the arrangement, Lev Sergeievitch. A private trader is no easy title to bear these days. Consider the rent on your living quarters, for instance. That alone could swallow all the profits. Now if we say you're the sole owner—well, the rent won't be so much since you have just this one room here to pay for. Now me, for instance, we have three large rooms, Tonia and me, and if they brand me a private trader—Good Lord Almighty!—the rent on that will wreck the whole business.”

“That's all right,” said Leo. “I'll carry it. I don't mind if

I'm called private trader or Nicholas II or Mephistopheles."

"That's it," Morozov chuckled too loudly, his chin and stomach shaking. "That's it. And, Lev Sergeievitch, sir, you won't regret it. The profits—Lord bless us!—the profits will make the old what-they-called-bourgeois look like beggars. With our little scheme, we'll sweep in the rubles, easy as picking 'em off the street. A year or two and we're our own masters. A few hundreds slipped where necessary and we can fly abroad—to Paris, or Nice or Monte Carlo, or any of the foreign places that are pleasant and artistic."

"Yes," said Leo wearily. "Abroad." Then he shook his head, as if breaking off an unbearable thought, and turned imperiously, throwing orders to the man who was hiring him: "But that friend of yours—the Communist—that's the danger point of the whole scheme. Are you sure of him?"

Morozov spread his fat arms wide, shaking his head gently, reproachfully, his smile as soothing as Vaseline: "Lev Sergeievitch, soul of mine, you don't think I'm a helpless babe making my first steps in business, do you? I'm as sure of him as of the eternal salvation of our souls, that's how sure I am. He's as smart a young man as ever you could hope to find. Quick and reasonable. And not one of those windbags that like to hear themselves talk. He's not aiming to get nothing but big words and dried herring out of his life, no, sir. He knows when he has bread and butter in his hands—and he won't let it slip through. And then again, he's the one who takes the big chance. One of us common folks, if caught, might wiggle out with ten years in Siberia, but for one of them Party men—it's the firing squad and no time to say good-bye."

"You don't have to worry, Leo," Antonina Pavlovna smiled, "I've met the young man. We entertained him at a little tea—champagne and caviar, to be exact. He is smart and thoroughly dependable. You can have absolute faith in Koko's business judgment."

"And it's not so difficult for him, either," Morozov lowered his voice to a barely audible whisper. "He's got one of those engineering positions with the railroad—and he's got pull in all directions, like a river with tributaries. All he has to do is see that the food shipment is damaged a bit—dropped accidentally, or dampened a little, or something—and see that it's pronounced worthless. That's all. The rest is simple. The shipment goes quietly to the basement of our little store—Lev Kovalensky. Food Products. Nothing suspicious."

there?—just supplies for the store. The State co-operatives are short a load of stuff and the good citizens get nothing on their ration cards but an excuse and a promise. We wait a couple of weeks and we break up the load and ship it to our own customers—private dealers all over three provinces, a whole net of them, reasonable and discreet—I have all the addresses. And that's all. Who has to know? If anyone comes snooping around the store—well, we'll have some punk clerk there and he'll sell them half a pound of butter if they ask for it, and that's all we're doing, for all they know—retail trade—open and legal."

"And furthermore . . ." Antonina Pavlovna whispered, "if anything should go wrong, that young Communist has . . ."

"Yes," Morozov whispered, and looked around furtively, and paused to listen for any suspicious sound from behind the door, and, reassured, murmured, his lips at Leo's ear: "He has connections in the G.P.U. A powerful friend and protector. I'd be scared to mention the name."

"Oh, we'll be safe from that quarter," Leo said contemptuously, "if we have enough money."

"Money? Why, Lev Sergeievitch, soul of mine, we'll have so much money you'll be rolling ten-ruble bills to make cigarettes. We split it three ways, you understand; me, yourself and the Communist pal. We'll have to slip a little to his friends at the railroad, and to the Upravdom, and we'll pay your rent here—that'll go under expenses. But then you must remember that on the face of it, you're the sole owner. It's your store, in your name. I have my position with the State Food Trust to think about. If I had a private store registered to my name, they'd kick me out. And I've got to keep that job. You can see how useful it will be to us."

He winked at Leo. Leo did not smile in answer, but said: "You don't have to worry. I'm not afraid."

"Then, it's settled, eh? Why, pal, in a month from now you won't believe you ever lived like this. You'll put some flesh on those sunken cheeks of yours, and some pretty clothes on Kira Alexandrovna, and a diamond bracelet or two, and then maybe a motor-car and . . ."

"Leo, are you insane?"

Kira's chair clattered against the wall, and the lamp rocked and settled, shivering with a thin, glassy tinkle. She stood, the three startled faces turned to her.

"This isn't a joke you're playing on me, is it? Or have you lost your mind entirely?"

Leo leaned back slowly, looking straight at her, and asked coldly: "When did you assume the privilege of talking to me like that?"

"Leo! If that's a new way of committing suicide, there are much simpler ones!"

"Really, Kira Alexandrovna, you are unnecessarily tragic about it," Antonina Pavlovna remarked coolly.

"Now, now, Kira Alexandrovna, soul of mine," Morozov said amicably, "sit down and calm yourself and let's talk it over quietly. There's nothing to be excited about."

She cried: "Leo, don't you see what they're doing? You're nothing but a living screen for them! They're investing money. You're investing your life!"

"I'm glad to find some use for it," Leo said evenly.

"Leo, listen, I'll be calm. Here. I'll sit down. Listen to me: you don't want to do a thing like that with your eyes closed. Look at it, think it over: you know how hard life is these days. You don't want to make it harder, do you? You know the government we're facing. It's difficult enough to keep from under its wheels. Do you want to invite it to grind you? Don't you know that it's the firing squad for anyone caught in a crooked, criminal speculation?"

"I believe Leo has made it clear that he did not need advice," said Antonina Pavlovna, holding her cigarette poised gracefully in mid-air.

"Kira Alexandrovna," Morozov protested, "why use such strong names for a simple business proposition which is perfectly permissible and almost legal and . . ."

"You keep quiet," Leo interrupted him and turned to Kira. "Listen, Kira, I know that this is as rotten and crooked a deal as could be made. And I know I'm taking a chance on my life. And I still want to do it. You understand?"

"Even if I begged you not to?"

"Nothing you can say will change things. It's a filthy, low, disgraceful business. Certainly. But who forced me into it? Do you think I'll spend the rest of my life crawling, begging for a job, starving, dying slowly? I've been back two weeks. Have I found work? Have I found a promise of work? So they shoot food speculators? Why don't they give us a chance at something else? You don't want me to risk my life. And what is my life? I have no career. I have no future. I couldn't do what Victor Dunaev is doing if I were boiled ~~in~~ for punishment! I'm not risking much when I risk i

"Lev Sergeievitch, soul of mine," Morozov sighed with admiration, "how you can talk!"

"You two can go now," Leo ordered. "I'll see you tomorrow, Morozov, and we'll look at the store."

"Indeed, Leo, I'm surprised," Antonina Pavlovna remarked, rising with dignity. "If you let yourself be influenced and do not seem to be gracious about appreciating an opportunity, when I thought you'd be grateful and . . ."

"Who's to be grateful?" he threw at her sharply, rudely. "You need me and I need you. It's a business deal. That's all."

"Sure, sure, that's what it is," said Morozov, "and I appreciate your help, Lev Sergeievitch. It's all right, Tonia, soul of mine, you come along now and we'll settle all the details tomorrow."

He spread his legs wide apart and got up with effort, his hands leaning on his knees. His heavy stomach shivered when he moved, making his body seem uncomfortably close and apparent under the wrinkles of his suit.

At the door, he turned to Leo: "Well, Lev Sergeievitch, shall we shake on it? We can't sign a contract, of course, you understand, but we'll depend on your word."

His mouth arched contemptuously, Leo extended his hand, as if the gesture were a victory over himself. Morozov shook it warmly, lengthily—and bowed low, in the old peasant manner, on his way out. Antonina Pavlovna followed without looking at Kira.

Leo accompanied them to the lobby. When he came back, Kira still stood as he had left her. He said before she had turned to him: "Kira, we won't argue about it."

"There's only one thing, Leo," she whispered, "and I couldn't say it in front of them. You said you had nothing left in life. I thought you had . . . me."

"I haven't forgotten it. And that's one of the reasons for what I'm doing. Listen, do you think I'm going to live off you for the rest of my days? Do you think I'm going to stand by and watch you dragging excursions and swallowing soot over the Primus? That fool Antonina doesn't have to lead excursions. She wouldn't wear your kind of dresses to scrub floors in—only she doesn't have to scrub floors. Well, you won't have to, either. You poor little fool! You don't know what life can be. You've never seen it. But you're going to see it. And I'm going to see it before they finish me. Listen, if I knew for certain that it's the firing squad in six months—I'd still do it!"

She leaned against the table, because she felt faint. She whispered: "Leo, if I begged you, for all of my love for you, for all of yours, if I told you that I'd bless every hour of every excursion, every floor I'd scrub, every demonstration I'd have to attend, and every Club, and every red flag—if only you wouldn't do this—would you still do it?"

He answered: "Yes."

*

Citizen Karp Morozov met Citizen Pavel Syerov in a restaurant. They sat at a table in a dark corner. Citizen Morozov ordered cabbage soup. Citizen Syerov ordered tea and French pastry. Then Citizen Morozov leaned forward and whispered through the soup steam: "All settled, Pavlusha. I got the man. Saw him yesterday."

Pavel Syerov held his cup at his lips, and his pale mouth barely moved, so that Morozov guessed rather than heard the question: "Who?"

"Lev Kovalensky is the name. Young. Hasn't got a brass coin in the world and doesn't give a damn. Desperate. Ready for anything."

The white lips formed without sound: "Dependable?"

"Thoroughly."

"Easy to handle?"

"Like a child."

"Will keep his mouth shut?"

"Like a tomb."

Morozov unloaded a heavy spoonful of cabbage into his mouth; one strand remained hanging out; he drew it in with a resounding *smaek*. He leaned closer and breathed: "Besides, he's got a social past. Father executed for counter-revolution. In case of anything . . . he'll be the right person to blame. A treacherous aristocrat, you know."

Syerov whispered: "All right." His spoon cut into a chocolate éclair, and a soft, yellow custard spurted, spreading over his plate. He hissed through white lips, low, even sounds without expression: "Now listen here. I want my share in advance—on every load. I don't want any delays. I don't want to ask twice."

"So help me God, Pavlusha, you'll get it, you don't have to tell me, you . . ."

"And another thing, I want caution. Understand? From now on, you don't know me, see? If we me

—we're strangers. Antonina delivers the money to me in that whorehouse, as agreed."

"Sure. Sure. I remember everything, Pavlusha."

"Tell that Kovalensky bum to keep away. I don't want to meet him."

"Sure. You don't have to."

"Got the store?"

"Renting it today."

"All right. Now sit still. I go first. You sit here for twenty minutes. Understand?"

"Sure. The Lord bless us."

"Keep that for yourself. Good day."

*

A secretary sat at a desk in the office of the railroad terminal. She sat behind a low wooden railing and typed, concentrating intently, drawing her upper lip in and biting her lower one. In front of the railing, there was an empty stretch of unswept floor and two chairs; six visitors waited patiently, two of them sitting. A door behind the secretary was marked: 'Comrade Syerov.'

Comrade Syerov returned from lunch. He strode swiftly through the outer office, his tight, shiny military boots creaking. The six heads of the visitors jerked anxiously, following him with timid, pleading glances. He crossed the room as if it were empty. The secretary followed him into his inner office.

A picture of Lenin hung on the wall of the inner office, over a broad, new desk; it hung between a diagram showing the progress of the railroads, and a sign with red letters saying: COMRADES, STATE YOUR BUSINESS BRIEFLY. PROLETARIAN EFFICIENCY IS THE DISCIPLINE OF PEACE-TIME REVOLUTIONARY CONSTRUCTION.

Pavel Syerov took a flat, gold cigarette case from his pocket, lighted a cigarette, sat down at the desk and looked through a stack of papers. The secretary stood waiting diffidently.

Then he raised his head and asked: "What's doing?"

"There are those citizens outside, Comrade Syerov, waiting to see you."

"What about?"

"Mostly jobs."

"Can't see anyone today. Got to hurry to the Club meeting in half-an-hour. Have you typed my Club report on 'Railroads as the blood vessels of the Proletarian State?'"

"Yes, Comrade Syerov. Here it is."

"Fine."

"Those citizens out there, Comrade Syerov, they've been waiting for three hours."

"Tell them to go to hell. They can come tomorrow. If anything important comes up, call me at the Railroad Workers' Union headquarters. I'll be there after the Club. . . . And, by the way, I'll be in late tomorrow."

"Yes, Comrade Syerov."

*

Pavel Syerov walked home from the Railroad Workers' Union headquarters, with a Party friend. Syerov was in a cheerful mood. He whistled merrily and winked at passing girls. He said: "Think I'm going to throw a party tonight. Haven't had any fun for three weeks. Feel like dissipating. What do you say?"

"Swell," said the friend.

"Just a little crowd, our own bunch. At my place?"

"Swell."

"I know a fellow who can get vodka—the real stuff. And let's go to Des Gourmets and buy up everything they have in the joint."

"I'm with you, pal."

"Let's celebrate."

"What'll we celebrate?"

"Never mind. Just celebrate. And we don't have to worry about expenses. Hell! I'm not worrying about expenses when I want a good time."

"That's right, comrade."

"Whom'll we call? Let's see: Grishka and Maxim, with their girls."

"And Lizaveta."

"Sure, I'll call your Lizaveta. And Valka Dourova—there's a girl!—she'll bring half a dozen fellows along. And, I guess, Victor Dunaev with his girl, Marisha Lavrova. Victor's a nit that's going to be a big louse some day—have to keep on the good side of him. And . . . say, pal, do you think I should invite Comrade Sonia?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Oh, hell. That cow's after me. Has been for over a year. Trying to make me. And I'll be damned if I . . . No appetite."

"But then, Pavlusha, you've got to be careful. If you hurt her feelings, with Comrade Sonia's position . . ."

"I know. Hell! Two profunions and five women's clubs wrapped around her little finger. Oh, hell! Oh, all right. I'll call her."

*

Pavel Syerov had pulled the curtains down over the three windows of his room. One of the girls had draped an orange scarf over the lamp, and it was almost dark. The guests' faces were whitish blots strewn over the chairs, the davenport, the floor. In the middle of the floor stood a dish with a chocolate cake from Des Gourmets; someone had stepped on the cake. A broken bottle lay on the pillow of Syerov's bed; Victor and Marisha sat on the bed. Victor's hat lay on the floor by the davenport; it was being used as an ashtray. A gramophone played "John Gray"; the record was stuck, whirling, repeating persistently the same hoarse, grating notes; no one noticed it. A young man sat on the floor, leaning against a bed post, trying to sing; he muttered a tuneless, mournful chant into his collar; once in a while, he jerked his head up and screeched a high note, so that the others shuddered and someone flung a shoe at a pillow at him, yelling: "Grishka, shut up!" Then his head drooped again. A girl lay in a corner, by the cuspidor, asleep, her hair glued in sticky strands to a glistening, flushed face.

Pavel Syerov staggered across the room, waving an empty bottle, muttering in an offended, insistent voice: "A drink. . . . Who wants a drink? . . . Doesn't anyone want a drink? . . ."

"Hell, Pavel, your bottle's empty . . ." someone called from the darkness.

He stopped, swaying, held the bottle up to the light, spat, and threw the bottle under the bed. "So you think I haven't any more?" he waved his fist menacingly at the room. "Think I'm a piker, don't you? . . . A measly piker who can't afford enough vodka? . . . A measly piker, that's what you think, don't you? . . . Well, I'll show you . . . I'll show you who can't afford things. . . . I'll show you. . . ."

He fumbled in a box under the table and rose, swaying, brandishing an unopened bottle over his head. He laughed: "I can't afford it, can I?" and reeled toward the corner from where the voice had come. He giggled at the white spots that turned to look up at him; he swung the bottle in a huge circle and brought it down to smash with a ringing blast against a book case. A girl screamed; glass splattered in a tinkling rain. A man swore violently.

"My stockings, Pavel, my stockings!" the girl sobbed, pulling her skirt high over drenched legs.

A man's arms reached for her from the darkness: "Never mind, sweetheart. Take 'em off."

Syerov giggled triumphantly: "So I can't afford it, can I? . . . Can I? . . . Pavel Syerov can afford anything now! . . . Anything on this God-damn earth! . . . He can buy you all, guts and souls!"

Someone had crawled under the table and was fumbling in the box, looking for more bottles.

A hand knocked at the door.

"Come in!" roared Syerov. No one came in. The hand knocked again. "What the hell? What do you want?" He tottered to the door and threw it open.

His next-door neighbor, a fat, pallid woman, stood in the corridor, shivering in a long, flannel nightgown, clutching an old shawl over her shoulders, brushing strands of gray hair out of her sleepy eyes.

"Citizen Syerov," she whined with indignation, "won't you please stop that noise? At such an indecent hour . . . you young people have no shame left these days . . . no fear of God . . . no . . ."

"On your way, grandma, on your way!" Syerov ordered. "You crawl under your pillow and keep your damn mouth shut. Or would you like to take a ride to the G.P.U.?"

The woman wheeled about hastily and shuffled away, making the sign of the cross.

Comrade Sonia sat in a corner by the window, smoking. She wore a tailored khaki tunic with pockets on her hips and breast; it was made of expensive foreign cloth, but she kept dropping ashes on her skirt. A girl's voice pleaded in a plaintive whisper at her elbow: "Say, Sonia, why did you have Dashka fired from the office? She needed the job, she did, and honest . . ."

"I do not discuss business matters outside of office hours," Comrade Sonia answered coldly. "Besides, my actions are always motivated by the good of the collective."

"Oh, sure, I don't doubt it, but, listen, Sonia. . . ."

Comrade Sonia noticed Pavel Syerov swaying at the door. She rose and walked to him, cutting the girl off in the middle of a sentence.

"Come here, Pavel," said Comrade Sonia, her strong arm supporting him, leading him to a chair. "You'd better sit down. Here. Let me make you comfortable."

"You're a pal, Sonia," he muttered, while she stuffed a pillow between his shoulder blades, "you're a real pal. Now you wouldn't holler at me if I made a little noise, would you?"

"Of course not."

"You don't think that I can afford a little vodka, like some skunks here think, do you, Sonia?"

"Of course not, Pavel. Some people don't know how to appreciate you."

"That's it. That's just the trouble. I'm not appreciated. I'm a great man. I'm going to be a very great man. But they don't know it. No one knows it. . . . I'm going to be a very, very powerful man. I'm going to make the foreign capitalists look like mice. . . . That's what: mice. . . . I'm going to give orders to Comrade Lenin himself."

"Pavel, our great chief is dead."

"That's right. So he is. Comrade Lenin's dead. . . . Oh, what's the use? . . . I've got to have a drink, Sonia. I feel very sad. Comrade Lenin's dead."

"That's very nice of you, Pavel. But you'd better not have another drink just now."

"But I'm very sad, Sonia. No one appreciates me."

"I do, Pavel."

"You're a pal. You're a real, real pal, Sonia. . . ."

On the bed, Victor held Marisha in his arms. She giggled, counting the buttons on his tunie; she lost count after the third one and started over again. She was whispering: "You're a gentleman, Victor, that's what you are, a gentleman. . . . That's why I love you, because you're a gentleman. . . . And I'm only a gutter brat. My mother, she was a cook before . . . before. . . . Well, anyway, before. I remember, many, many years ago, she used to work in a big, big house, they had horses and carriages and a bathroom, and I used to peel vegetables for her, in their kitchen. And there was an elegant young man, their son, oh, he had such pretty uniforms and he spoke all sorts of foreign languages, he looked just like you. And I didn't even dare to look at him. And now I have a gentleman of my own," she giggled happily, "isn't it funny? I, Marishka the vegetable peeler!"

Victor said: "Oh, shut up!" and kissed her, his head drooping sleepily.

A girl giggled, standing over them in the darkness: "When are you two going to get registered at the marriage office?"

"Go 'way," Marisha waved at her. "We'll be registered. We're engaged."

Comrade Sonia had pulled a chair close to Syerov's, and he sprawled, his head on her lap, while she stroked his hair. He was muttering: "You're a rare woman, Sonia. . . . You're a wonderful woman. . . . You understand me. . . ."

"I do, Pavel. I've always said that you were the most talented, the most brilliant young man in our collective."

"You're a wonderful woman, Sonia." He was kissing her, moaning: "No one appreciates me."

He had pulled her down to the floor, leaning over her soft, heavy body, whispering: "A fellow needs a woman. . . . A smart, understanding, strong and hefty woman. . . . Who cares for those skinny scarecrows? . . . I like a woman like you, Sonia. . . ."

He did not know how he found himself suddenly in the little storage closet between his room and that of his neighbors. A cobwebbed window high under the ceiling threw a dusty ray of moonlight on a towering pile of boxes and baskets. He was leaning against Comrade Sonia's shoulder, stammering: "They think Pavel Syerov's just gonna be another stray mongrel eating outta slop pails all his life. . . . Well, I'll show 'em! Pavel Syerov'll show 'em who's got the whip. . . . I've got a secret . . . a great secret, Sonia. . . . But I can't tell you. . . . But I've always liked you, Sonia. . . . I've always needed a woman like you, Sonia . . . soft and comfortable. . . ."

When he tried to stretch himself on the flat top of a large wicker basket, the piled tower shuddered, swayed and came down with a thundering crash. The neighbors knocked furiously, protesting, against the wall.

Comrade Sonia and Pavel Syerov, on the floor, paid no attention.

V

The clerk wiped his nose with the back of his hand and wrapped a pound of butter in a newspaper. He had cut the butter from a soggy, yellow circle that stood on a wooden barrel top on the counter before him; he wiped the knife on his apron that had once been white. His pale eyes watered; his lips were a concavity on a crumpled face; his long chin hovered uncom-

comfortably over a counter too high for the wizened skeleton under his old blue sweater. He sniffled and, showing two broken, blackened teeth, grinned at the pretty customer in the blue hat trimmed with cherries:

"Best butter in town, citizen, very best butter in town."

On the counter stood a pyramid of square bread loaves, dusty black and grayish white. Above the counter hung a fringe of salami, bagles and dried mushrooms. Flies hovered at the greasy brass bowls of old weighing scales and crawled up the dusty panes of a single, narrow window. Over the window, smeared by the first rain of September, hung a sign:

LEV KOVALENSKY. FOOD PRODUCTS

The customer threw some silver coins on the counter and took her package. She was turning to go when she stopped involuntarily, for a brief, startled moment, looking at the young man who had entered. She did not know that he was the owner of the store; but she knew that she could not have many occasions to see that kind of young man on the streets of Petrograd. Leo wore a new, foreign overcoat with a belt laced tightly across his trim, slender waistline; he wore a gray foreign felt hat, one side of its brim turned up over an arrogant profile with a cigarette held in the corner of his mouth by two long, straight fingers in a tight, glistening, foreign leather glove. He moved with the swift, confident, unconscious grace of a body that seemed born for these clothes, like the body of an animal for its regal fur, like the body of a foreign fashion plate.

The girl looked straight at him, softly, defiantly. He answered with a glance that was an invitation, and a mocking insult, and almost a promise. Then he turned and walked to the counter, as she went out slowly.

The clerk bowed low, so that his chin touched the circle of butter: "Good day, Lev Sergeievitch, good day, sir."

Leo flicked the ashes off his cigarette into an empty can on the counter and asked: "Any cash in the register?"

"Yes, sir, can't complain, business was good today, sir, and . . ."

"Let me have it."

The man's gnarled hand fingered his chin uncertainly; he muttered: "But, sir, Karp Karpovitch said last time you . . ."

"I said let me have it."

"Yes, sir."

Leo stuffed the bills carelessly into his wallet. He asked, lowering his voice: "Did that shipment arrive last night?"

The clerk nodded, blinking confidentially, with an intimate little giggle.

"Shut up," said Leo. "And be careful."

"Why, yes, sir, yes indeed, sir, you know I'm the soul of discretion, as they say in society, if I may say so, sir. Karp Karpovitch knows that he can trust a loyal old servant who has worked for him for . . ."

"You could use some flypaper here once in a while."

"Yes, sir, I . . ."

"I won't be in again today. Keep the store open till the usual hour."

"Yes, sir. Good day, sir."

Leo walked out without answering.

On the corner, the girl in the blue hat trimmed with cherries was waiting for him. She smiled hopefully, uncertainly. He hesitated for a second; then he smiled and turned away; his smile spread a flush of red on the cheeks and nose under the blue brim. But she stood, watching him jump into a cab and drive away.

He drove to the Alexandrovsky market. He walked swiftly past the old wares spread on the sidewalk, ignoring the eager, pleading eyes of their owners. He stopped at a little booth displaying porcelain vases, marble clocks, bronze candlesticks, a priceless loot that had found its way from some demolished palace into the dusty twilight of the market.

"I want something for a gift," he threw at the clerk who bowed solicitously. "A wedding gift."

"Yes, indeed," the clerk bowed. "Ah . . . for your bride, sir?"

"Certainly not. For a friend."

He looked indifferently, contemptuously at the delicate, cracked dusty treasures that should have reposed on velvet cushions in a museum showcase.

"I want something better," he ordered.

"Yes, indeed, sir," the clerk bowed, "something beautiful for a beloved friend."

"No. For someone I hate." He pointed at a vase of blue and gold porcelain in a corner. "What's that?"

"Ah, sir, that!" The clerk reached timidly for the vase and brought it slowly, cautiously to the counter; its price had made him hesitate to show it even to a customer in a for coat. "Genuine Sèvres, sir," he whispered, brushing

out of the vase, upturning it to show the delicate mark on the bottom. "A royal object, sir," he breathed, "a truly royal object."

"I'll take it," said Leo.

The clerk swallowed and fumbled at his tie, watching the wallet in the gloved fingers of a customer who had not even asked the price.

*

"Comrades, in these days of peaceful State Construction, the workers of Proletarian culture are the shock battalion in the vanguard of the Revolution. The education of the Worker-Peasant masses is the great problem of our Red week-days. We, excursion leaders, are a part of the great peace-time army of educators, imbued with the practical methodology of historical materialism, attuned to the spirit of Soviet reality, dedicated to . . ."

Kira sat in the ninth row, on a chair that threatened to fold under her at any moment. The meeting of excursion guides was coming to an end. Around her, heads drooped wearily and eyes looked furtively, hopefully at a large clock on the wall, the speaker's head. But Kira tried to listen; she held her fixed on the speaker's mouth to catch every word; she wished the words were louder. But the words could not drown out the voices ringing in her mind: a voice over the telephone, pleading, trying not to sound pleading: "Kira, why do I see you so seldom?"; an imperious voice in the darkness of her room at night: "What are those visits of yours, Kira? You said you were at Irina's yesterday. But you weren't." How long could she keep it up? She had not seen Andrei for three weeks.

The chairs around her clattered; the meeting was over. She hurried down the stairway. She was saying to a fellow guide: ". . . yes, a splendid speech. Of course, our cultural duty to the proletariat is our primary goal . . ." It was easy to say. It was easy, after she had looked straight at Leo and laughed: "Leo, why those foolish questions? Don't you trust me?" pressing her hand to her breast to hide the mark of Andrei's teeth.

She hurried home. In Marisha's room, two trunks and a wicker basket stood in the middle of the floor; empty drawers gaped open; posters were torn off the walls and piled on the trunks. Marisha was not at home.

In Kira's room, a maid hurried from the hissing Primus by the window to take her coat.

"Leo hasn't returned yet, has he?" Kira asked.

"No, ma'am."

Kira's coat was old, with rubbed patches on the elbows. Her dress had grease stains on the collar and threads hanging out of its frayed hem. With one swift movement, Kira pulled it off over her head and threw it to the maid, shaking her dishevelled hair. Then she fell on the bed, kicking off her old shoes with run-down heels, tearing off her darned, cotton stockings. The maid knelt by the bed, pulling thin silk stockings up Kira's slender legs, slipping delicate, high-heeled pumps on her feet; then she rose to help her into a trim dark woolen dress. The maid put the old coat and shoes into a wardrobe that contained four new coats and six pairs of new shoes.

But Kira had to keep her job for the protection of the title of Soviet employee; and she had to wear her old clothes to protect her job.

An extravagant bouquet of white lilies, Leo's latest gift, stood on the table. The white petals had caught a few specks of soot from the Primus. Kira had a maid, but no kitchen. The maid came for five hours every day and cooked their meals on the Primus by the window.

Leo came home, carrying the Sèvres vase wrapped in newspapers.

"Isn't dinner ready yet?" he asked. "How many times have I told you that I hate to have that thing smoking when I come home?"

"It's ready, sir." The maid hurried to turn off the Primus, her young, round face obedient and frightened.

"Have you bought the present?" Kira asked.

"There it is. Don't unwrap it. It's fragile. Let's have dinner. We'll be late."

After dinner, the maid washed the dishes and left. Kira sat at her mirror, carefully outlining her lips with a real French lipstick.

"You're not wearing that dress, are you?" Leo asked.

"Why, yes."

"No, you're not. Put on the black velvet one."

"But I don't feel like dressing up. Not for Victor's wedding. I wouldn't go at all, if it weren't for Uncle Vasil."

"Well, since we're going, I want you to look your best."

"But, Leo, is it wise? He's going to have many of his Party friends there. Why show them that we have money?"

"Why not? Certainly, we have money. Let them see that we have money. I'm not going to act like trash for the benefit of trash."

"All right, Leo. As you wish."

He looked at her appraisingly when she stood before him, severe as a nun, graceful as a Marquise of two centuries past, her hands very white and thin on the soft black velvet. He smiled with approval and took her hand, as if she were a lady at a Court reception, and kissed her palm, as if she were a courtesan.

"Leo, what did you buy for them?" she asked.

"Oh, just a vase. You may see it, if you wish."

She unwrapped the newspapers and gasped. "Leo! But this . . . this cost a fortune!"

"Certainly. It's Sèvres."

"Leo, we can't give it to them. We can't let them see that we can afford it. Really, it's dangerous."

"Oh, nonsense."

"Leo, you're playing with fire. Why bring such a present for all the Communists to see?"

"That's exactly why."

"But they know that a regular private trader couldn't afford to like this."

"Oh, stop being foolish!"

"Take that thing back and exchange it."

"I won't."

"Then I'm not going to the party."

"Kira . . ."

"Leo, please!"

"Oh, very well!"

He seized the vase and flung it to the floor. It burst into glittering splinters. She gasped. He laughed: "Well, come on. You can buy them something else on our way there."

She stood looking at the splinters. She said dully: "Leo, all that money . . ."

"Will you ever forget that word? Can't we live without thinking of it all the time?"

"But you promised to save. We'll need it. Things may not last as they are."

"Oh, nonsense! We have plenty of time to start saving."

"But don't you know what they mean, all those hundreds, there, on the floor? Don't you remember it's your life that you're gambling for every one of those rubles?"

"Certainly, I remember. That's just what I do remember. How do I know I have a future? Why save? I may never need it. I've trembled over money long enough. Can't I throw it away if I want to—while I can?"

"All right, Leo. Come on. We'll be late."

"Come on. Stop frowning. You look too lovely to frown."

*

In the Dunaev dining room, a bunch of asters stood in a bowl on the table, and a bunch of daisies on the buffet, and a bunch of nasturtiums on an upright piano. The piano had been borrowed from the tenants; long streaks remained on the parquet, following its trail from the door.

Victor wore a modest dark suit and a modest expression of youthful happiness. He shook hands and smiled and bowed graciously, acknowledging congratulations. Marisha wore a purple woolen dress, and a white rose on her shoulder. She looked bewildered; she watched Victor's movements with a timid, incredulous pride; she blushed and nodded hastily to the compliments of guests, and shook hands without knowing whose hands they were, her eyes vague, roving, searching for Victor.

The guests shuffled in, and muttered best wishes, and settled down uncomfortably. The friends of the family were strained, suspicious and cautiously, elaborately polite to the Party members. The Party members were awkward, uncertain and helplessly polite to the friends of Victor's bourgeois past. The guests did not sound quite natural in their loud assurances of happiness, when they looked at the silent, stooped figure of Vasili Ivanovitch with a quiet, anguished question frozen in his eyes; at Irina in her best patched dress, with her jerky movements and her strident voice of unnatural gaiety.

Little Acia wore a pink bow on a stiff strand of hair, that kept slipping toward her nose. She giggled, once in a while, glancing up at a guest, biting her knuckles. She stared at Marisha with insolent curiosity. She snooped around the table that displayed the wedding gifts, an odd assortment of objects: a bronze clock, a China ashtray in the shape of a skull, a new Primus, a complete set of Lenin's works in red paper covers. Irina watched her closely, to drag her away in time from the buffet and the dishes of pastry.

Galina Petrovna followed Victor persistently, patting him on the shoulder, repeating: "I'm so happy, so happy, my dear boy!" The muscles of Victor's face were fixed in a wide grin, over his sparkling white teeth; he did not have to smile; he merely turned his head to her and nodded without a change of expression.

When Victor escaped from her, Galina Petrovna

Vasili Ivanovitch's shoulder, repeating: "I'm so happy, so happy, Vasili. You have a son to be proud of." Vasili Ivanovitch nodded as if he had not heard.

When Kira entered, the first person she saw, standing alone by a window, was Andrei.

She stopped short at the door. His eyes met hers and moved slowly to the man who held her arm. Leo smiled faintly, contemptuously.

Kira walked straight to Andrei; she looked graceful, erect, supremely confident, in her regal black gown; she extended her hand, saying aloud: "Good evening, Andrei. I'm so glad to see you."

His eyes told her silently that he understood, that he would be cautious, while he shook her hand with a friendly, impersonal smile.

Leo approached them slowly, indifferently. He bowed to Andrei and asked, his voice courteous, his smile insolent: "So you're a friend of Victor's, too?"

"As yourself," Andrei answered.

Kira walked on, without hurry, to congratulate Victor and Marisha. She nodded to acquaintances, and smiled, and talked to Irina. She knew that the eyes of the man by the window were following her; she did not turn to look at him.

She had talked to many guests before she approached Andrei again, as if by chance; Leo was busy listening to Lydia at the other end of the room.

Andrei whispered eagerly: "Victor has always been inviting me. This is the first time that I've accepted. I knew you'd be here. Kira, it has been three weeks . . ."

"I know. I'm sorry, Andrei. But I couldn't. I'll explain later. I'm glad to see you—if you're careful."

"I'll be careful. What a lovely dress, Kira. New?"

"Oh . . . yes. It's a present from mother."

"Kira, do you always go to parties with him?"

"Do you mean Leo?"

"Yes."

"I hope you don't presume to dictate the friends with whom I may . . ."

"Kira!" He was startled by the icy firmness of her voice; he was apologizing: "Kira, I'm sorry. Of course I didn't mean . . . Forgive me. I know I have no right to say . . . But you see, I've always disliked him."

She smiled gaily, as if nothing had happened, and leaning

into the shadow of the window niche, pressed his fingers swiftly.

"Don't worry," she whispered and, moving away from him, turned, shaking her hair, throwing at him through the tousled locks a glance of such warm, sparkling understanding that he caught his breath, thrilled by the secret they were guarding together, among strangers, for the first time.

Vasili Ivanovitch sat alone in a corner, under a lamp, and the light of a rose satin shade made his white hair pink. He looked at the shuffling feet, at the military boots of young Communists, at the blue fog of smoke streaks that billowed halfway up to the ceiling, in soft, round waves, like a heavy, transparent mixture boiling slowly, at a gold cross on a black velvet ribbon around Lydia's throat, a bright spark piercing the fog across the room.

Kira approached and sat down beside him. He patted her hand, and said nothing, and knew that she knew. Then he said, as if she had followed his unspoken thoughts: ". . . I wouldn't mind so much if he loved her. But he doesn't. . . . Kira, you know, when he was a little boy with such big black eyes, I used to look at my customers, those ladies that were like paintings of empresses, and I wondered which one of them was the mother of the little beauty, growing up somewhere, who, some day, would be my daughter, too. . . . Have you met Marisha's parents, Kira?"

Galina Petrovna had cornered Leo; she was saying enthusiastically: ". . . so glad you're successful, Leo. I've always said that a brilliant young man, like you, would have no trouble at all. That dress of Kira's is magnificent. I'm so happy to see what good care you take of my little girl. . . ."

Victor sat on the arm of a chair occupied by red-headed Rita Eksler. He leaned close to her, holding his cigarette to light the one at her lips. Rita had just divorced her third husband; she narrowed her eyes under the long red bangs and whispered confidential advice. They were laughing softly.

Marisha approached timidly and took Victor's hand with a clumsy movement of coquetry. He jerked his hand away; he said impatiently: "We can't neglect our guests, Marisha. Look, Comrade Sonia is alone. Go and talk to her."

Marisha obeyed humbly. Rita's glance followed her through a jet of smoke; Rita pulled her short skirt up and crossed her long, thin legs.

"Indeed," said Comrade Sonia coldly with an air of final authority, "I cannot say that I congratulate you or

choice, Comrade Lavrova. A true proletarian does not marry out of her class."

"But, Comrade Sonia," Marisha protested, stupefied, "Victor is a Party member."

"I've always said that the rules of Party admission were not sufficiently strict," said Comrade Sonia.

Marisha wandered dejectedly through the crowd of guests. No one looked at her and she had nothing to say. She saw Vasili Ivanovitch alone by the buffet, lining up bottles and glasses. She approached him and smiled hesitantly. He looked at her, astonished. She said with determination, very quickly, bluntly, running her words together, blushing: "I know you don't like me, Vasili Ivanovitch. But, you see, I . . . I love him so much."

Vasili Ivanovitch looked at her, then said: "It's very nice, child," his voice expressionless.

Marisha's family sat in a dark corner, solemn, morose, uncomfortable. Her father—a stooped, gray-haired man in a worker's blouse and patched trousers—clasped long, calloused hands over his knee; his face, with a bitter slash of a mouth, leaned forward, his fierce, brilliant eyes studying the room fixedly; his eyes were dark and young on a withered face. His wife huddled timidly behind him, pallid and shapeless in a flowered calico dress, her face like a sandy shore washed by any rains into a dull, quiet gray. Marisha's young brother, lanky boy of eight, stood holding onto his mother's skirt, owing angry, suspicious glances at little Acia.

Victor joined Pavel Syerov and a group of three men in leather jackets. He threw one arm around Syerov's shoulders and the other around those of the secretary of their Party Cell; he leaned on them both, intimately, confidentially, his dark eyes smiling. Comrade Sonia, approaching, heard him whisper: ". . . yes, I'm proud of my wife's family and their revolutionary record. Her father—you know—he was exiled to Siberia, under the Czar."

Comrade Sonia remarked: "Comrade Dunaev is a very smart man."

Neither Victor nor Syerov liked the tone of her voice. Syerov protested: "Victor's one of our best workers, Sonia."

"I said Comrade Dunaev is very smart," she repeated, and added: "I wouldn't doubt his class loyalty. I'm sure he has nothing in common with patrician gentlemen such as that Citizen Kovalensky over there."

Pavel Syerov looked fixedly at Leo's tall figure bending over

Rita Eksler. He asked: "Say, Victor, that man's name—it's Lev Kovalensky, isn't it?"

"Leo Kovalensky, yes. He's a very dear friend of my cousin's. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing at all."

Leo noticed Kira and Andrei sitting side by side on a window sill. He bowed to Rita, who shrugged impatiently, and walked toward them slowly.

"Am I intruding?" he asked.

"Not at all," said Kira.

He sat down beside her. He took out his gold cigarette case and, opening it, held it out to her. She shook her head. He held it over to Andrei. Andrei took a cigarette. Leo bent forward to light it, leaning over Kira.

"Sociology being the favorite science of your Party," said Leo, "don't you find this wedding an occasion of particular interest, Comrade Taganov?"

"Why, Citizen Kovalensky?"

"As an opportunity to observe the essential immutability of human nature. A marriage for reasons of state is one of the oldest customs of mankind. It has always been advisable to marry into the ruling class."

"You must remember," said Andrei, "the social class to which the person concerned belongs."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Kira. "They're in love with each other."

"Love," said Leo, "is not part of the philosophy of Comrade Taganov's Party. Is it?"

"It is a question that has no reason to interest you," Andrei answered.

"Hasn't it?" Leo asked slowly, looking at him. "That's what I'm trying to find out."

"Is it a question that contradicts your . . . theory on the subject?" Andrei asked.

"No. I think it supports my theory. You see, my theory is that members of your Party have a tendency to place their sexual desires high above their own class." He was looking straight at Andrei, but he pointed lightly, with his cigarette, at Marisha across the room.

"If they do," Andrei answered slowly, "they're not always unsuccessful." He was looking straight at Kira, but he pointed at Victor.

"Marisha looks happy," said Kira. "Why do you resent it,

till you drown the last rag of conscience in your fool brains, drink to anything you wish. But when you drink to the Soviets, don't drink to me!"

In the dead silence of the room, a man laughed suddenly, a loud, ringing, resonant laughter. It was Andrei Taganov.

Pavel Syerov jumped up and, throwing his arm around Victor's shoulders, yelled, waving his glass: "Comrades, there are traitors even in the ranks of the workers! Let's drink to those who are loyal!"

Then there was much noise, too much noise, glasses clinked, voices rose, hands slapped shoulders, everybody yelled at once. No one looked at Lavrov.

Only Vasili Ivanovitch approached him slowly and stood looking at him. Their eyes met. Vasili Ivanovitch extended his glass and said: "Let us drink to our children's happiness, even though you don't think that they will be happy, and I don't, either."

They drank.

At the other end of the room, Victor seized Marisha's wrist, dragging her aside, and whispered, his white lips at her ear: "You damn fool! Why didn't you tell me about him?"

She muttered, blinking, her eyes full of tears: "I was scared. I knew you wouldn't like it, darling. . . . Oh, darling, you shouldn't have . . ."

"Shut up!"

There were many drinks to follow. Victor had provided a good supply of bottles and Pavel Syerov helped to open them speedily. The trays of pastry were emptied. Dirty dishes were stacked on the tables. A few glasses were broken. Cigarette smoke hung as a motionless blue cloud under the ceiling.

Marisha's family had left. Galina Petrovna sat sleepily, trying to keep her head erect. Alexander Dimitrievitch snored softly, his head on the arm of his chair. Little Acia had fallen asleep on a trunk in the corridor, her face smeared with chocolate frosting. Irina sat in a corner, watching the crowd indifferently. Comrade Sonia bent under the pink lamp, reading a newspaper. Victor and Pavel Syerov were the center of a group at the buffet that clinked glasses and tried to sing revolutionary songs in muffled voices. Marisha wandered about listlessly, her nose shiny, the white rose wilted and brownish on her shoulder.

Lydia staggered to the piano and put an arm around Marisha's waist. "It's beautiful," said Lydia in a thick, sad voice, "it's beautiful."

"What's beautiful?" Marisha asked.

"Love," said Lydia. "Romance. That's it: romance. . . . Ah, love is rare in this world. They are few, the chosen few. . . . We wander through a barren existence without romance. There are no beautiful feelings left in the world. Has it ever occurred to you that there are no beautiful feelings left in the world?"

"That's too bad," said Marisha.

"It's sad," Lydia sighed. "That's what it is: sad. . . . You're a very lucky girl. . . . But it's sad. . . . Listen, I'm going to play something beautiful for you. . . . Something beautiful and sad. . . ."

She struck the keys uncertainly. She played a gypsy love song, her fingers rushing suddenly into quick, sharp trill then lingering on long, sad chords, then slipping on the wrong notes, her head nodding.

Andrei whispered to Kira: "Let's go, Kira. Let me take you home."

"I can't, Andrei. I . . ."

"I know. You came with him. But I don't think he's in condition to take you home."

He pointed at Leo across the room. Leo's head, thrown back, was leaning heavily against an armchair. His one arm encircled Rita's waist; the other was thrown across the shoulders of a pretty blonde who giggled softly at something he was muttering. Rita's head rested on his shoulder and her hand caressed his dishevelled hair.

Kira rose silently, leaving Andrei, and walked to Leo. She stood before him and said softly: "Leo, we had better go home."

He waved sleepily. "Leave me alone. Get out of here."

She noticed suddenly that Andrei stood behind her. He said: "You'd better be careful of what you say, Kovalensky."

Leo pushed Rita aside and the blonde slid, giggling, to the floor. He said, frowning, pointing at Kira: "And you'd better keep away from her. And you'd better stop sending her gifts and watches and such. I resent it."

"What right have you to resent it?"

Leo stood up, swaying, smiling ominously: "What right? I'll tell you what right. I'll . . ."

"Leo," Kira interrupted firmly, weighing her every word, her voice loud, her eyes holding his, "people are looking at you. Now what is it you wanted to say?"

"Nothing," said Leo.

"If you weren't drunk . . ." Andrei began.

"If I weren't drunk, you'd what? You seem sober. And yet not sober enough not to be making a fool of yourself over a woman you have no right to approach."

"Well, listen to me, you . . ."

"You'd better listen, Leo," Kira interrupted again. "Andrei finds this the proper time to tell you something."

"What is it, Comrade G.P.U.?"

"Nothing," said Andrei.

"Then you'd better leave her alone."

"Not while you seem to forget the respect that you owe to . . ."

"Are you defending *her* against *me*?" Leo burst out laughing. Leo's laughter could be more insulting than his smile, more insulting than a slap in the face.

"Come on, Kira," said Andrei, "I'll take you home."

"Yes," said Kira.

"You're not taking her anywhere!" Leo roared. "You're . . ."

"Yes, he is!" Irina interrupted, stepping suddenly between them. Leo stared at her, amazed. With sudden strength, she whirled him about, pushing him into a window niche, while she nodded to Andrei, ordering him to hurry. He took Kira's arm and led her out; she followed silently, obediently.

Irina hissed into Leo's face: "Are you insane? What were you trying to do? Yell for all of them to hear that she's your mistress?"

Leo shrugged and laughed indifferently: "All right. Let her go with anyone she pleases. If she thinks I'm jealous, she's mistaken."

Kira sat silently in the cab, her head thrown back, her eyes closed.

"Kira," Andrei whispered, "that man is no friend of yours. You shouldn't be seen with him."

She did not answer.

When they were driving by the palace garden, he asked: "Kira, are you too tired to . . . stop at my house?"

She said indifferently: "No. I'm not. Let's stop."

•

When she came home, Leo was sprawled on the bed, dressed, asleep. He raised his head and looked at her.

"Where have you been, Kira?" he asked so

"Just . . . just driving around," she said

"I thought you had gone. Forever. . . . What was it I said, tonight, Kira?"

"Nothing," she whispered, kneeling by his side.

"You should leave me, Kira. . . . I wish you could leave me. . . . But you won't. . . . You won't leave me, Kira. . . . Kira . . . will you?"

"No," she whispered. "Leo, will you leave that business of yours?"

"No. It's too late. But before . . . before they get me . . . I still have you, Kira . . . Kira . . . Kira . . . I love you . . . I still have you. . . ."

She whispered: "Yes," pressing his face, white as marble, to the black velvet of her dress.

VI

"Comrades! The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics is surrounded by a hostile ring of enemies who watch and plot for its downfall. But no external enemy, no heinous plot of world imperialists is as dangerous to us as the internal enemy of dissension within our own ranks."

Tall windows checkered into small square panes were closed against the gray void of an autumn sky. Columns of pale golden marble rose spreading into dim vaults. Five portraits of Lenin, somber as ikons, looked down upon a motionless crowd of leather jackets and red kerchiefs. A tall lectern, like the high, thin stem of a torch, stood at the head of the hall; above the lectern, like the flame of the torch spurting high to the ceiling, hung a banner of scarlet velvet with gold letters: "The All-Union Communist Party is the leader of the world fight for Freedom!" The hall had been a palace; it looked like a temple; those in it looked like an army, stern, silent and tense, receiving its orders. It was a Party meeting.

A speaker stood at the lectern. He had a little black beard, and wore a pince-nez that sparkled in the twilight; he waved long arms with very small hands. Nothing moved in the hall before him, but drops of rain rolling slowly down the window panes.

"Comrades! A grave new danger has been growing among

us in this last year. I call it the danger of over-idealism. We've all heard the accusations of its deluded victims. They cry that Communism has failed, that we've surrendered our principles, that since the introduction of NEP—our New Economic Policy—the Communist Party has been retreating, fleeing before a new form of private profiteering which now rules our country. They claim that we are holding power for the sake of power and have forgotten our ideals. Such is the whining of weaklings and cowards who cannot face practical reality. It is true that we've had to abandon the policy of Military Communism, which had brought us to the brink of total starvation. It is true that we've had to make concessions to private traders. What of it? A retreat is not a defeat. A temporary compromise is not a surrender. We were betrayed by the spineless, weak-kneed, anemic socialists of foreign countries who sold out their working masses to their bourgeois masters. The World Revolution, which was to make a pure world Communism possible, has been delayed. We, therefore, have had to compromise, for the time being. We have had to abandon our theories of pure Communism and come down to earth, to the prosaic task of economic reconstruction. Some may think it a slow, drab, uninspiring process; but loyal Communists know the epic grandeur of our new economic front. Loyal Communists know the revolutionary value and significance of our ration cards, our Primuses, the lines at our co-operatives. Our great leader, Comrade Lenin, with his usual farsightedness, warned us several years ago against the danger of being 'over-idealistic.' That perilous fallacy has smitten some of our best heads. It has taken from us the man who had been one of our first leaders—Leon Trotsky. None of his past services to the Proletariat could redeem the treachery of his assertion that we've betrayed Communism. His followers have been thrown out of our ranks. That is why we've had Party purges. That is why these purges will continue. We must follow, with absolute discipline, the program dictated by our Party—and not the petty doubts and personal opinions of the few who still think of themselves and of their so-called conscience in terms of bourgeois individualism. We don't need those who take a selfish, old-fashioned pride in the purity of their own convictions. We need those who are not afraid of a little compromise. We don't need the obstinate, unbending Communist of iron. The new Communist is of rubber! Idealism, comrades, is a good thing in its proper amount. Too much of it is like too much of a good old wine: one's liable to lose one's head. Let

this be a warning to any of Trotsky's secret sympathizers who might still remain within the Party: no past services, no past record will save them from the axe of the next Party purge. They are traitors and they will be kicked out, no matter who they are or what they've been!"

Hands applauded clamorously. Then the still, black rows of jackets broke into motion; men rose; the meeting was closed.

They gathered in groups, whispering excitedly. They giggled, muffling the sound with a hand pressed to a mouth. They pointed furtively at a few solitary figures. Behind the huge checkered windows, the lead of the sky was turning to a dark blue steel.

"Congratulations, pal," someone slapped Pavel Syerov's shoulder. "I heard you've been elected vice-president of the Railroad Workers Union's Club of Leninism."

"Yes," Syerov answered modestly.

"Good luck, Pavlusha. You're an example of activity for all of us to follow. No worries about Party purges for you."

"I've always striven to keep my Party loyalty above suspicion," Syerov answered modestly.

"Say, pal, you see, it's still two weeks till the first of the month and I've . . . well . . . I'm slightly in need of cash . . . and . . . well . . . I thought maybe. . . ."

"Sure," said Syerov, opening his wallet, "with pleasure."

"You never turn a friend down, Pavlusha. And you always seem to have enough to . . ."

"Just being economical with my salary," Syerov said modestly.

Comrade Sonia was waving her short arms, trying to plough her way through an eager group that followed her persistently. She was snapping at them: "I'm sorry, comrade, that's out of the question. . . . Yes, comrade, I'll be glad to give you an appointment. Call my secretary at the Zhenotdel. . . . You will find it wise to follow my suggestion, comrade. . . . I'd be happy to address your Circle, comrade, but unfortunately, I'm giving a lecture at a Rabfac Club at that hour. . . ."

Victor had taken the bearded speaker of the meeting aside and was whispering eagerly, persuasively: "I received my diploma at the Institute two weeks ago, comrade. . . . You understand that the job I'm holding at present is quite unsatisfactory for a full-fledged engineer and . . ."

"I know, Comrade Dunaev, I know the position you desire. Personally, I know of no better man to fill it. And I'd do

anything in my power for the husband of my friend Marisha Lavrova. But . . ." He looked around cautiously, over the rim of his pince-nez, and drew closer to Victor, lowering his voice. "Just between you and me, comrade, there's a grave obstacle in your way. You understand that that hydroelectric project is the most stupendous undertaking of the republic at present, and every job connected with it is assigned with particular caution and . . ." his voice dropped to a whisper, "your Party record is magnificent, Comrade Dunaev, but you know how it is, there are always those inclined to suspicion, and . . . Frankly, I've heard it said that your social past . . . your father and family, you know . . . But don't give up hope. I'll do all I can for you."

Andrei Taganov stood alone in an emptying row of chairs. He was buttoning his leather jacket slowly. His eyes were fixed on the flaming scarlet banner above the lectern.

At the top of the stairs, on his way out, he was stopped by Comrade Sonia.

"Well, Comrade Taganov," she asked loudly, so that others turned to look at them, "what did you think of the speech?"

"It was explicit," Andrei answered slowly, all the syllables of his voice alike, as grains of lead.

"Don't you agree with the speaker?"

"I prefer not to discuss it."

"Oh, you don't have to," she smiled pleasantly. "You don't have to. I know—we know—what you think. But what I'd like you to answer is this: why do you think you are entitled to your own thoughts? Against those of the majority of your Collective? Or is the majority's will sufficient for you, Comrade Taganov? Or is Comrade Taganov becoming an individualist?"

"I'm very sorry, Comrade Sonia, but I'm in a hurry."

"It's all right with me, Comrade Taganov. I have nothing more to say. Just a little advice, from a friend: remember that the speech has made it plain what awaits those who think themselves smarter than the Party."

Andrei walked slowly down the stairs. It was dark. Far below, a bluish gleam showed a floor of polished marble. A street lamp beyond the tall window threw a blue square of light, checkered into panes, on the wall by the staircase; little shadows of raindrops rolled slowly down the wall. Andrei walked down, his body slender, erect, unhurried, steady, the kind of body that in centuries past had worn the Roman, the mail of a crusader; it wore a le-

Its tall, black shadow moved slowly across the blue square of light and raindrops on the wall:

*

Victor came home. He flung his coat on a chair in the lobby and kicked his galoshes into a corner. The galoshes upset an umbrella stand that clattered down to the floor. Victor did not stop to pick it up.

In the dining room, Marisha sat before a pile of opened volumes, bending her head to one side, writing studiously, biting her pencil. Vasili Ivanovitch sat by a window, carving a wooden box. Acia sat on the floor, mixing sawdust, potato peelings and sunflower-seed shells in a broken bowl.

"Dinner ready?" snapped Victor.

Marisha fluttered up to throw her arms around him. "Not . . . not quite, darling," she apologized. "Irina's been busy and I have this thesis to write for tomorrow and . . ."

He threw her arms off impatiently and walked out, slamming the door. He went down a dim corridor to Irina's room. He threw the door open without knocking. Irina stood by the window, in Sasha's arms, his lips on hers. She jerked away from him; she cried: "Victor!", her voice choked with indignation. Victor wheeled about without a word and slammed the door behind him.

He returned to the dining room. He roared at Marisha: "Why the hell isn't the bed made in our room? The room's like a pigsty. What have you been doing all day?"

"But darling," she faltered, "I . . . I've been at the Rabfac, and then at the Lenin's Library meeting, and the Wall Newspaper's Editorial Board, and then there's this thesis on Electrification I have to read tomorrow at the Club, and I don't know a thing about Electrification and I've had to read so much and . . ."

"Well, go and see if you can heat something on the Primus. I expect to be fed when I come home."

"Yes, dear."

She gathered her books swiftly, nervously. She hurried, pressing the heavy pile to her breast, dropped two books by the door, bent awkwardly to pick them up, and went out.

"Father," said Victor, "why don't you get a job?"

Vasili Ivanovitch raised his head slowly and looked at him. "What's the matter, Victor?" he asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Only it's rather foolish to be regis-

tered as an unemployed bourgeois and be constantly under suspicion."

"Victor, we haven't discussed our political views for a long time, you know. But if you want to hear it—I will not work for your government so long as I live."

"But surely, Father, you're not hoping still that . . ."

"What I'm hoping is not to be discussed with a Party man. And if you're tired of the expense . . ."

"Oh, no, Father, of course it isn't that."

Sasha passed through the dining room on his way out. He shook hands with Vasili Ivanovitch. He patted Acia's head. He went out without a word or a glance at Victor.

"Irina, I want to speak to you," said Victor.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I want to speak to you—alone."

"Anything you have to say, father may hear it."

"Very well. It's about that man," he pointed at the door that had closed behind Sasha.

"Yes?"

"I hope you realize the infernal situation."

"No. I don't. What situation?"

"Do you know with what type of man you're carrying on an affair?"

"I'm not carrying on any affair. Sasha and I are engaged."

Victor jerked forward, opening his mouth and closing it again, then said slowly, with an effort to control himself: "Irina, that's utterly impossible."

She stood before him, her eyes steady, menacing, scornful. She asked: "Is it? Just exactly why?"

He learned toward her, his mouth twitching. "Listen," he hissed; "don't make any useless denials. I know what your Sasha Chernov is. He's up to his neck in counter-revolutionary plots. It's none of my business. I'm keeping my mouth shut. But it won't be long before others in the Party discover it. You know the end for bright lads like him. Do you expect me to stand by and watch my sister marrying a counter-revolutionary? What do you think it will do to my Party standing?"

"What it will do to your Party standing or to yourself," Irina said with meticulous precision, "concerns me less than the cat's leavings on the back stairs."

"Irina!" Vasili Ivanovitch gasped. Victor whirled upon him.

"You tell her!" Victor roared. "It's hard enough to get anywhere with the millstone of this family tied around my neck!"

You can roll straight down to hell, if you all enjoy it so nobly, but I'll be damned if you're going to drag me along!"

"But, Victor," Vasili Ivanovitch said quietly, "there's nothing either you or I can do about it. Your sister loves him. She has a right to her own happiness. God knows, she's had little enough of it these last few years."

"If you're so afraid for your damn Party hide," said Irina, "I'll get out of here. I'm making enough for myself. I could starve on my own on what one of your Red clubs considers a living salary! I'd have gone long ago, if it weren't for father and Acial!"

"Irina," Vasili Ivanovitch moaned, "you won't do that!"

"In other words," Victor asked, "you refuse to give up that young fool?"

"And also," Irina answered, "I refuse to discuss him with you."

"Very well," said Victor, "I've warned you."

"Victor!" Vasili Ivanovitch cried. "You're—you're not going to harm Sasha, are you?"

"Don't worry," Irina hissed, "he won't. It would be too compromising for his Party standing!"

*

Kira met Vava Milovskaia in the street, but could hardly recognize her, and it was Vava who approached timidly, muttering: "How are you, Kira?"

Vava wore an old felt hat made over from her father's derby, with a broken brim that looked as if it had not been brushed for days. One black curl hung carelessly over her right cheek, her mouth was smeared unevenly with a faded, purplish lipstick, and her little nose was shiny, but her eyes were dull; her eyes looked swollen, aged, indifferent.

"Vava, I haven't seen you for such a long time. How are you?"

"I'm . . . I'm married, Kira."

"You . . . Why, congratulations. . . . When?"

"Thanks. Two weeks ago." Vava's eyes were looking away; she muttered, staring at the street: "I . . . we . . . we didn't have a big wedding, so we didn't invite anyone. Just the family. You see, it was a church wedding, and Kolya didn't want that known at the office where he works."

"Kolya . . . ?"

"Yes, Kolya Smiatkin, you probably don't remember him, you met him at my party, though. . . . That's what I am

now: Citizen Smiatkina. . . . He works at the Tobacco Trust, and it's not a very big job, but they say he'll get a raise. . . . He's a very nice boy . . . he . . . he loves me very much. . . . Why shouldn't I have married him?"

"I didn't say you shouldn't have, Vava."

"What is there to wait for? What can one do with oneself, these days, if one isn't . . . if one isn't a . . . What I like about you, Kira, is that you're the first person who didn't say she wished me to be happy!"

"But I do wish it, Vava."

"Well, I'm happy!" She tossed her head defiantly. "I'm perfectly happy!"

Vava's hand in a soiled glove rested on Kira's arm; she hesitated, as if she feared Kira's presence, and closed her fingers tighter over Kira's arm, as if she were afraid to let her go, as if she were hanging on desperately to something she did not want to utter. Then she whispered, looking away: "Kira . . . do you think . . . *he's* happy?"

"Victor is not a person who cares about being happy," Kira answered slowly.

"I wouldn't mind . . ." Vava whispered, "I wouldn't mind . . . if she were pretty. . . . But I saw her. . . . Oh, well, anyway, it doesn't concern me at all. Not in the least. . . . I'd like you to come over and visit us, Kira, you and Leo. Only . . . only we haven't found a place to live yet. I moved into Kolya's room, because . . . because my old room . . . well, father didn't approve, you see, so I thought it would be better to move out. And Kolya's room—it's a former storage closet in a big apartment, and it's so small that we . . . But when we find a room, I'll invite you to come over and . . . Well, I have to run along. . . . Good-bye, Kira."

"Good-bye, Vava."

*

"He's not in," said the gray-haired woman.

"I'll wait," said Comrade Sonia.

The woman shuffled uncomfortably from foot to foot and chewed her lips. Then she said: "Don't see how you can wait, citizen. We've got no reception room. I'm only Citizen Syerov's neighbor and my quarters . . ."

"I'll wait in Citizen Syerov's room."

"But, citizen . . ."

"I said I'll wait in Citizen Syerov's room."

Comrade Sonia walked resolutely down the corridor. The

old neighbor followed, nodding dejectedly, watching the swift heels of Comrade Sonia's flat, masculine shoes.

Pavel Syerov jumped up when Comrade Sonia entered. He threw his arms wide in a gesture of surprise and welcome.

"Sonia, my dear!" he laughed very loudly. "It's you! My dear, I'm so sorry. I was busy and I had given orders . . . but had I known . . ."

"It's quite all right," Comrade Sonia dismissed the subject. She threw a heavy brief case on the table and unbuttoned her coat, unwinding a thick, masculine scarf from her neck. She glanced at her wristwatch. "I have half an hour to spare," she said. "I'm on my way to the Club. We're opening a Lenin's Nook today. I had to see you about something important."

Syerov offered her a chair and pulled on his coat, adjusting his tie before a mirror, smoothing his hair, smiling ingratiatingly.

"Pavel," said Comrade Sonia, "we've going to have a baby." Syerov's hands dropped. His mouth fell open. "A . . . ?"

"A baby," Comrade Sonia said firmly.

"What the . . ."

"It's been three months, I know," said Comrade Sonia.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I wasn't sure."

"But hell! You'll have to . . ."

"It's too late to do anything now."

"Why the devil didn't you . . ."

"I said it was too late."

Syerov fell on a chair before her and stared intently, unruffled calm. "Are you sure it's mine?" he asked her.

"Pavel," she said without raising her voice, "you're me."

He jumped up, and walked to the door, and came back, sat down again, and jumped up. "Well, what is it to do about it?"

"We're going to be married, Pavel."

He bent toward her, his closed fist on the table. "You're gone crazy," he said heavily.

She looked at him, silently, waiting.

"You're crazy, I tell you! I have no such intention."

"But you'll have to do it."

"I will, will I? You get out of here, you hear?"

"Pavel," she said softly, "don't say that. I have no regret."

"Listen . . . what the . . . we're not."

country. Hell! There's no such thing as a betrayed virgin . . . and you were no virgin anyway . . . and . . . Well, if you want to go to court—try and collect for its support—and the devil take you—but there's no law to make me marry you! Marry! Hell! You'd think we lived in England or something!"

"Sit down, Pavel," said Comrade Sonia, adjusting a button on her cuff, "and don't misunderstand me. My attitude on the subject is not old-fashioned in the least. I am not concerned over morals or public disgrace or any such nonsense. It is merely a matter of our duty."

"Our . . . what?"

"Our duty, Pavel. To a future citizen of our republic."

Syerov laughed; it sounded as if he were blowing his nose. "Cut that out!" he said. "You're not addressing a Club meeting."

"Indeed," said Comrade Sonia, "so loyalty to our principles is not part of your private life?"

He jumped up again. "Now, Sonia, don't misunderstand me. Of course, I am always loyal and our principles . . . of course, it is a fine sentiment and I appreciate it . . . but then, what's the difference to the . . . future citizen?"

"The future of our republic is in the coming generation. The upbringing of our youth is a vital problem. Our child shall have the advantage of a Party mother—and father—to guide its steps."

"Hell, Sonia! That's not at all up to date. There are day-nurseries and, you know, collective training, one big family, the spirit of the collective learned early in life, and . . ."

"State nurseries are to be the great accomplishment of the future. At present—they are imperfect. Our child shall be brought up as a perfect citizen of our great republic. Our child . . ."

"Our child! Oh, hell! how do I know . . ."

"Pavel, are you intimating that . . ."

"Oh, no, no, I didn't mean anything, but . . . Hell! Sonia, I was drunk. You should have known better than . . ."

"Then you regret it, Pavel?"

"Oh, no, no, of course not. You know I love you, Sonia. . . . Sonia, listen, honest, I can't get married right now. Really, I'd like nothing better and I'd be proud to marry you, but look here, I'm just starting, I've got a career to think about. I've just made such a fine beginning, and . . . and . . . duty to the Party to train and perfect myself and rise

"I could help you, Pavel, or . . ." She said it slowly, looking at him. She did not have to finish; he understood.

"But, Sonia . . ." he moaned helplessly.

"I'm as upset about it as you are," she said calmly. "It was a more painful surprise to me than it is to you. But I'm prepared to do what I consider my duty."

He fell heavily on his chair and said dully, without raising his head: "Listen, Sonia, give me two days, will you? To think it over and get sort of used to the idea and . . ."

"Certainly," she answered, rising, "think it over. My time's up anyway. Have to run. So long."

"So long," he muttered, without looking at her.

Pavel Syerov got drunk, that evening. On the following day, he called at the Railroad Workers Union's Club. The president said: "Congratulations, Comrade Syerov. I hear you're going to marry Comrade Sonia. You couldn't make a better match." At the Party Cell, the secretary said: "Well, Pavlusha, all set to go far in this world? With such a wife . . ." At the Marxist Club, an imposing official, whom he had never met before, smiled, slapping his shoulder: "Come and see me any time, Comrade Syerov. I'm always in to a friend of your future wife."

That evening, Pavel Syerov called Antonina Pavlovna and swore at Morozov and requested a larger share than he had been getting, and demanded it in advance—and, receiving it, bought drinks for a girl he met on the street.

Three days later, Pavel Syerov and Comrade Sonia were married. They stood before a clerk in the bare room of the Zags and signed a large register. Comrade Sonia signified her intention of retaining her maiden name.

That evening, Comrade Sonia moved into Syerov's room, which was larger than her own. "Oh, darling," she said, "we must think of a good revolutionary name for our child."

*

A hand knocked on Andrei's door, a weighty knock followed by a thud, as if a fist had leaned heavily against the panel.

Andrei sat on the floor, studying, with a lamp by his side, with the huge white sheets of drafts spread before him. He raised his head and asked impatiently: "Who's there?"

"It's me, Andrei," a man's voice answered heavily. "Open the door. It's me, Stepan Timoshenko."

Andrei jumped up and threw the door open. Stepan Timoshenko, who had served in the Baltic Fleet and in the Coast Guard of the G.P.U., stood on the stair-landing, sway-

ing a little, leaning against the wall. He wore a sailor's cap, but its band bore no star, no ship's name; he wore civilian clothes, a short jacket with a mangy rabbit fur collar, with rubbed spots on the elbows of sleeves too tight for his huge arms; the fur collar was unfastened; his tanned neck with bulging cords was open to the cold. He grinned, the light glistering on his white teeth, in his dark eyes.

"Good evening, Andrei. Mind if I butt in?"

"Come in. I'm glad to see you. I thought you had forgotten your old friends."

"No," said Timoshenko. "No, I haven't." He lumbered in, and closed the door behind him, reeling a little. "No, I haven't. . . . But some of the old friends are only too damn glad to forget me. . . . I don't mean you, Andrei. No. Not you."

"Sit down," said Andrei. "Take that coat off. Aren't you cold?"

"Who, me? No. I'm never cold. And if I was, it would do me no good because this here is all I've got. . . . I'll take the damn thing off. . . . Here. . . . Sure, all right, I'll sit down. I bet you want me to sit down because you think I'm drunk."

"No," said Andrei, "but . . ."

"Well, I am drunk. But not very much. You don't mind if I'm a little drunk, do you?"

"Where have you been, Stepan? I haven't seen you for months."

"Oh, around. I was kicked out of the G.P.U., you know that, don't you?"

Andrei nodded slowly, looking down at his drafts on the floor.

"Yep," said Timoshenko, stretching his feet out comfortably, "I was kicked out. Not reliable. No. Not reliable. Not revolutionary enough. Stepan Timoshenko of the Red Balt-fleet."

"I'm sorry," said Andrei.

"Shut up. Who's asking you for sympathy? That's funny, that's what it is. . . . Very, very humorous. . . ." He looked up at the cupids on the cornice. "And you've got a funny place here. It's a hell of a place for a Communist to live in."

"I don't mind," said Andrei. "I could move, but rooms are so hard to get these days."

"Sure," said Timoshenko and laughed suddenly, loudly, senselessly. "Sure. It's hard for Andrei Taganov. It wouldn't be hard for little Comrade Syerov, for instance. It wouldn't be hard for any bastard that uses a Party card as a butcher knife

It wouldn't be hard to throw some poor devil out on the ice of the Neva."

"You're talking nonsense, Stepan. Would you . . . would you like something to eat?"

"No. Hell, no. . . . What are you driving at, you little fool? Think I'm starving?"

"Why, no, I didn't even . . ."

"Well, don't. I still have enough to eat. And to drink. Plenty to drink. . . . I just came around because I thought little Andrei needed someone to look after him. Little Andrei needs it badly. He will need it very badly."

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing. Nothing, pal. Just talking. Can't I talk? Are you like the rest of them? Want everybody to talk, order them to talk, talk, talk, without the right to say anything?"

"Here," said Andrei, "put that pillow under your neck and take it easy. Rest. You're not feeling well."

"Who, me?" Timoshenko took the pillow and flung it at the wall and laughed. "I've never felt better in my life. I feel grand. Free and finished. No worries. No worries of any kind any more."

"Stepan, why don't you come here more often? We used to be friends. We could still help each other."

Timoshenko leaned forward, and stared at Andrei, and grinned somberly: "I can't help you, kid. I could help you only if you could take me by the scruff of my neck and kick me out and with me kick out everything that goes with me, and then go and bow very low and lick a very big boot. But you won't do it. And that's why I hate you, Andrei. And that's why I wish you were my son. Only I'll never have a son. My sons are strewn all over the whorehouses of the U.S.S.R."

He looked down at the white drafts on the floor, and kicked a book, and asked: "What are you doing here, Andrei?"

"I was studying. I haven't had much time to study. I've been busy at the G.P.U."

"Studying, eh? How many years you got left at the Institute?"

"Three years."

"Uh-huh. Think you'll need it?"

"Need what?"

"The learning."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Say, pal, did I tell you they kicked me out of the G.P.U.?"

Oh, yes, I told you. But they haven't kicked me out of the Party. Not yet. But they will. At the next purge—I go."

"I wouldn't think of that in advance. You can still . . ."

"I know what I'm talking about. And you do, too. And do you know who'll go next?"

"No," said Andrei.

"You," said Stepan Timoshenko.

Andrei rose, crossed his arms, looked at Timoshenko, and said quietly: "Maybe."

"Listen, pal," Timoshenko asked, "have you got something to drink here?"

"No," said Andrei. "And you're drinking too much, Stepan."

"Oh, am I?" Timoshenko chuckled, and his head rocked slowly, mechanically, so that its huge shadow on the wall swung like a pendulum. "Am I drinking too much? And have I no reason to drink? Say, I'll tell you," he rose, swaying, towering over Andrei, his shadow hitting the doves on the ceiling. "I'll tell you the reason and then you'll say I don't drink enough, you poor little pup in the rain, that's what you'll say!"

He pulled at his sweater, too tight under the arms, and scratched his shoulder blades, and roared suddenly: "Once upon a time, we made a revolution. We said we were tired of hunger, of sweat and of lice. So we cut throats, and broke skulls, and poured blood, our blood, their blood, to wash a clean road for freedom. Now look around you. Look around you, Comrade Taganov, Party member since 1915! Do you see where men live, men, our brothers? Do you see what they eat? Have you ever seen a woman falling on the street, vomiting blood on the cobblestones, dying of hunger? I have. Did you see the limousines speeding at night? Did you see who's in them? There's a nice little comrade we have in the Party. A smart young man with a brilliant future. Pavel Syerov's the name. Have you ever seen him open his wallet to pay for a whore's champagne? Did you ever wonder where he gets the money? Did you ever go to the European roof garden? Not often, I bet. But if you had, you'd see the respectable Citizen Morozov getting indigestion on caviar. Who is he? Just assistant manager of the Food Trust. The State Food Trust of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. We're the leaders of the world proletariat and we'll bring freedom to all suffering humanity! Look at our Party. Look at the loyal members with ink still wet on their Party tickets. Watch them reaping the harvest from the soil that our blood had fertilized. But we're not red enough for them. We're not revolutionaries. We're kicked out

as traitors. We're kicked out for Trotzkyism. We're kicked out because we didn't lose our sight and our conscience when the Czar lost his throne, the sight and the conscience that made him lose it. We're kicked out because we yelled to them that they've lost the battle, strangled the revolution, sold out the people, and there's nothing left now but power, brute power. They don't want us. Not me nor you. There's no place for men like you, Andrei, not anywhere on this earth. Well, you don't see it. And I'm glad you don't. Only I hope I'm not there on the day when you will!"

Andrei stood, silent, his arms crossed. Timoshenko seized his jacket and pulled it on hastily, reeling.

"Where are you going?" asked Andrei.

"Going. Anywhere. I don't want to stay here."

"Stepan, don't you think that I see it, too? But screaming about it won't help. And drinking yourself to death won't help. One can still fight."

"Sure. Go on fighting. It's none of my business. I'm going to have a drink."

Andrei watched him buttoning the jacket, pulling the starless sailor cap over one ear. "Stepan, what are you going to do?"

"Now?"

"No. In the years to come."

"The years to come?" Timoshenko laughed, throwing his head back, the mangy rabbit collar shaking on his huge shoulders. "That's a cute sentence: the years to come. Why are you so sure they're coming?" He leaned toward Andrei, and winked slyly, mysteriously. "Did it ever occur to you, Comrade Taganov, what a peculiar thing it is that so many of our Party comrades are dying of overwork? You've read it in the papers, haven't you? Another glorious victim fallen on the path of the revolution, a life burned out in a ceaseless task. . . . You know what they are, don't you, those comrades dying of a ceaseless task? Suicides. That's what they are. Suicides. Only the papers will never say it. Funny how many of them are killing themselves these days. Wonder why."

"Stepan," Andrei took a huge, hot, clammy hand into his strong, cold ones, "you're not thinking of . . ."

"I'm not thinking of anything. Hell, no. All I want is a drink. And, anyway, if I do think, I'll come to say good-bye. I promise."

At the door, Andrei stopped him once again: "Stepan, why don't you stay here? For a while?"

Stepan Timoshenko waved with the majesty of sweeping a

mantle over his shoulders, and shook his head, reeling out to the landing of the long marble stairway:

"No. Not here. I don't want to see you, Andrei. I don't want to see that damn face of yours. Because . . . you see, I'm an old battleship, ready for the scrap heap, with all its guts rusted and rotted. But I don't mind that. And I'd give the last of these rotted guts to help the only man I know left in the world—and that's you. But I don't mind that. What I mind is that I know that could I take my guts out and give them for you—it still wouldn't save you!"

VII

Kira stood looking at a building under construction.

Jagged walls of red bricks, new and raw, checkered by a net of fresh, white cement, rose to a gray sky darkening slowly in an early twilight. High against the clouds, workers knelt on the walls, and iron hammers knocked, ringing sonorously over the street, and engines roared hoarsely, and steam whistled somewhere in a tangled forest of planks, beams, scaffoldings splattered with lime. She stood watching, her eyes wide, her lips smiling. A young man, with a tanned face and a pipe in the corner of his mouth, walked swiftly up the narrow planks in the perilous framework, and the movements of his hands were brusque, precise, implacable like the blows of a hammer. She did not know how long she had been standing there. She had forgotten all but the work before her. Then, suddenly, her world returning to her with a jolt, in a blinding second of clear, sharp perception—as if new eyes were taking a first glance at a new world and saw it as she had forgotten to see it—she wondered, astonished, why she was not there, on the scaffolding, giving orders like the man with the pipe, what reason could possibly keep her from her work, her life work, her only desire. It was one swift second, so swift that she felt it only after it was over; and after it was over, she saw the world again as she had grown accustomed to see it, and she remembered why she was not on the scaffolding, what reason had closed to her, forever, the only work she wanted. And in her mind, four words filled the void she felt rising from somew-

in her breast: "Perhaps . . . Some day . . . Abroad . . ."

A hand touched her shoulder: "What are you doing here, citizen?"

A militia-man was staring suspiciously down at her. He wore a peaked khaki cap, with a red star, over a low forehead. He squinted, opening soft lips that had no shape, like pillows: "You have been standing here for half an hour, citizen. What do you want?"

"Nothing," said Kira.

"Well, then, on your way, citizen."

"I was just looking," said Kira.

"You," decreed the militia-man, opening lips shapeless as pillows, "have no business looking."

She turned silently and walked away.

Against her skin, sewn on to her shirt, a little pocket was growing thicker, slowly, week by week. She kept in it the money she managed to save from Leo's reckless spending. It was a foundation rising for their future and perhaps—some day—abroad: . . .

She was returning home from a meeting of excursion guides. There had been a political examination at the Excursion Center: A man with a close-cropped head had sat at a broad desk, and trembling, white-lipped guides had stood before him; one after the other, answering questions in jerking, unnaturally bright voices. Kira had recited adequately the appropriate sounds about the importance of historical excursions for the political education and class-consciousness of the working masses; she had been able to answer the question about the state of the latest strike of textile workers in Great Britain; she had known all about the latest decree of the Commissar of People's Education in regard to the Schools for the Illiterates of the Turkestan; but she could not name the latest amount of coal produced by the mines of the Don basin.

"Don't you read the newspapers, comrade?" the examining official had asked sternly.

"Yes, comrade."

"I would suggest that you read them more thoroughly. We do not need limited specialists and old-fashioned academicians who know nothing outside their narrow professions. Our modern educators must be politically enlightened and show an active interest in our Soviet reality, in all the details of our state construction. . . . Next!"

She might be dismissed, Kira thought indifferently, walking home. She would not worry. She could not worry any longer.

She would not allow herself to reach the state of Comrade Nesterova, an elderly guide who had been a school teacher for thirty years. Comrade Nesterova, between excursions, school classes, clubs, and cooking for a paralyzed mother, spent all her time reading the newspapers, memorizing every item word for word, preparing herself for the examination. Comrade Nesterova needed her job badly. But when she had stood before the examiner, Comrade Nesterova had not been able to utter a word; she had opened her mouth senselessly, without a sound, and collapsed suddenly, shrieking, in hysterical tears; she had had to be carried out of the room and a nurse had been called. Comrade Nesterova's name had been crossed off the list of excursion guides.

Kira had forgotten the examination by the time she reached her house: she was thinking of Leo; she was wondering how she would find him that evening. The question arose, with a small twist of anxiety, every time she came home late and knew that she would find him there. He would leave in the morning, smiling and cheerful and brisk with energy; but she never knew what to expect at the end of the day. Sometimes she found him reading a foreign book, barely answering her greeting, refusing to eat, chuckling coldly once in a while at the bright lines of a world so far from their own. Sometimes she found him drunk, staggering across the room, laughing bitterly, tearing banknotes before her eyes when she spoke of the money he had spent. Sometimes she found him discussing art with Antonina Pavlovna, yawning, talking as if he did not hear his own words. Sometimes—rarely—he smiled at her, his eyes young and clear as they had been long ago, on their first meetings, and he pressed money into her hand, whispering: "Hide it from me. . . . For the escape. For Europe. . . . We'll do it . . . some day . . . if you can keep me from thinking . . . until then. . . . If we can only keep from thinking. . . ."

She had learned to keep from thinking; she remembered only that he was Leo and that she had no life beyond the sound of his voice, the movements of his hands, the lines of his body—and that she had to stand on guard between him and the something immense, unnamable which was moving slowly toward him, which had swallowed so many. She would stand on guard; nothing else mattered; she never thought of the past; the future—no one around her thought of the future.

She never thought of Andrei; she never allowed herself to wonder what the days, perhaps the years, ahead of her

have to be. She knew that she had gone too far and could not retreat. She was wise enough to know that she could not leave him; she was brave enough not to attempt it. In averting a blow he would not be able to stand, she was paying him, silently, for what she had done. Some day, she felt dimly, she would have to end the payment; the day when, perhaps, a passage abroad would open for Leo and her; then she would end it without hesitation, since Leo would need her; then Leo would be safe; nothing else mattered.

"Kira?" a gay voice called from the bathroom, when she entered their room.

Leo came out, a towel in his hand, naked from the waist up, shaking drops of water off his face, throwing tangled hair off his forehead, smiling.

"I'm glad you're back, Kira. I hate to come home and not find you here."

He looked as if he had just stepped out of a stream on a hot summer day, and one could almost see the sun sparkling in the drops of water on his shoulders. He moved as if his whole body were a living will, straight, arrogant, commanding, a will and a body that could never bend because both had been born without the capacity to conceive of bending.

She stood still, afraid to approach him, afraid to shatter one of the rare moments when he looked what he could have been, what he was intended to be.

He approached her and his hand closed over her throat and he jerked her head back to hold her lips to his. There was a contemptuous tenderness in his movement, and a command, and hunger; he was not a lover, but a slave owner. Her arms holding him, her mouth drinking the glistening drops on his skin, she knew the answer, the motive for all her days, for all she had to bear and forget in those days, the only motive she needed.

*

Irina came to visit Kira, once in a while, on the rare evenings she could spare from her work at the Club. Irina laughed sonorously, and scattered cigarette ashes all over the room, and related the latest, most dangerous political anecdotes, and drew caricatures of all their acquaintances on the white table cloth.

But on the evenings when Leo was busy at the store, when Kira and Irina sat alone at a lighted fireplace, Irina did not always laugh. Sometimes, she sat silently for long minutes and

when she raised her head and looked at Kira, her eyes were bewildered, pleading for help. Then she whispered, looking into the fire:

"Kira, I . . . I'm afraid. . . . I don't know why, it's only at times, but I'm so afraid. . . . What's going to happen to all of us? That's what frightens me. Not the question itself, but that it's a question you can't ask anyone. You ask it and watch people, and you'll see their eyes, and you'll know that they feel the same thing, the same fear, and you can't question them about it, but if you did, they couldn't explain it, either. . . . You know, we're all trying so hard not to think at all, not to think beyond the next day, and sometimes even not beyond the next hour. . . . Do you know what I believe? I believe *they're* doing it deliberately. *They* don't want us to think. That's why we have to work as we do. And because there's still time left after we've worked all day and stood in a few lines, we have the social activities to attend, and then the newspapers. Do you know that I almost got fired from the Club, last week? I was asked about the new oil wells near Baku and I didn't know a damn thing about them. Why should I know about the oil wells near Baku if I want to earn my millet drawing rotten posters? Why do I have to memorize newspapers like poems? Sure, I need the kerosene for the Primus. But does it mean that in order to have kerosene in order to cook millet, I have to know the name of every stinking worker in every stinking well where the kerosene comes from? Two hours a day of reading news of state construction for fifteen minutes of cooking on the Primus? . . . Well, and there's nothing we can do about it. If we try, it's worse. Take Sasha, for instance . . . Oh, Kira! I'm . . . I'm so afraid! . . . He . . . he . . . Well, I don't have to lie to you. You know what he's doing. It's a secret organization of some kind and they think they can overthrow the government. Set the people free. His duty to the people, Sasha says. And you and I know that any one of that great people would be only too glad to betray them all to the G.P.U. for an extra pound of linseed oil. They have secret meetings and they print things and distribute them in the factories. Sasha says we can't expect help from abroad, it's up to us to fight for our own freedom. . . . Oh, what can I do? I would like to stop him and I have no right to stop him. But I know they'll get him. Remember the students they sent to Siberia last spring? Hundreds, thousands of them. You'll never hear from any of them again. He's an orphan, hasn't a soul in the world, but me. I would tr^y to stop

WE THE LIVING

but he won't listen, and he's right, only I love him. I love
And he'll go to Siberia some day. And what's the use?
What's the use?"

Sasha Chernov turned the corner of his street, hurrying
me. It was a dark October evening and the little hand that
zed his coat belt seemed to have shot suddenly out of no-
here. Then he distinguished a shawl thrown over a little
head and a pair of eyes staring up at him, huge, unblinking,
terrified.

"Citizen Chernov," the girl whispered, her trembling body
pressed to his legs, stopping him, "don't go home."

He recognized his neighbor's daughter. He smiled and pal-
ted her head, but, instinctively, stepped aside, into the shadow
of a wall. "What's the matter, Katia?"

"Mother said . . ." the girl gulped, "mother said to tell
you not to come home. . . . There are strange men there."

. . . They've thrown your books all over the room. . . ."
"Thank your mother for me, kid," Sasha whispered and
whirled about and disappeared behind the corner. He had
had time to catch sight of a black limousine standing at the
door of his house.

He raised his collar and walked swiftly. He walked into a
and telephoned. A strange man's voice answered
gruffly. Sasha hung up without a word; his friend had been
arrested.

They had had a secret meeting, that night. They had dis-
cussed plans, agitation among the workers, a new printing
press. He grinned a little at the thought of the G.P.U. agents
looking at the huge pile of anti-Soviet proclamations in his
room. He frowned; tomorrow the proclamations would have
been distributed into countless hands in Petrograd's factories.

He jumped into a tramway and rode to another friend's
house. Turning the corner, he saw a black limousine at the
door. He hurried away.

He rode to a railroad terminal and telephoned again, a di-
ferent number. No one answered.

He walked, shuffling through a heavy slush, to another ad-
dress. He saw no light in the window of his friend's room.
But he saw the janitor's wife at the back yard gate, whisp-
ing excitedly to a neighbor. He did not approach the house.

He blew at his frozen, gloveless hands. He hurried to
more address. There was a light in the window for which

was looking. But on the window sill stood a vase of peculiar shape and that had been the danger signal agreed upon.

He took another tramway. It was late and the tramway was almost empty; it was lighted too brightly. A man in a military tunic entered at the next stop. Sasha got out.

He leaned against a dark lamp post and wiped his forehead. His forehead was burning with a sweat colder than the melting snow drops.

He was hurrying down a dark street when he saw a man in an old derby hat strolling casually on the other side. Sasha turned a corner, and walked two blocks, and turned again, and walked a block, and turned once more. Then he looked cautiously over his shoulder. The man in the old derby was studying the window of an apothecary shop three houses behind him.

Sasha walked faster. A gray snow fluttered over yellow lights over closed gates. The street was deserted. He heard no sound but that of his own steps crunching mud. But through the sound, and through the distant grating of wheels, and through the muffled, rumbling, rising knocks somewhere in his chest, he heard the shuffling, soft as a breath, of steps following him.

He stopped short and looked back. The man in the derby was bending to tie a shoe lace. Sasha looked up. He was at the door of a house he knew well. It took the flash of a second. He was behind the door and, pressed to a wall in a dark lobby, without movement, without breath, he watched the square of the glass pane in the door. He saw the man in the derby pass by. He heard his steps crunching away, slowing down, stopping, hesitating, coming back. The derby swam past the glass square again. The steps creaked, louder and lower, back and forth, somewhere close by.

Sasha swung noiselessly up the stairs and knocked at a door.

Irina opened it.

He pressed a finger to his lips and whispered: "Is Victor home?"

"No," she breathed.

"Is his wife?"

"She's asleep."

"May I come in? They're after me."

She pulled him in and closed the door slowly, steadily, taking a long, patient minute. The door touched the jamb without a sound.

Galina Petrovna came in with a bundle under her arm.

"Good evening, Kira. . . . My Lord, Kira, what a smell in this room!"

Kira rose indifferently, dropping a book. "Good evening, Mother. It's the Lavrovs next door. They're making sauerkraut."

"My Lord! So that's what he was mixing in the big barrel. He's certainly uncivil, that old Lavrov. He didn't even greet me. And after all, we're relatives, in a way."

Behind the door, a wooden paddle grated in a barrel of cabbage. Lavrov's wife sighed monotonously: "Heavy are our sins . . . heavy are our sins. . . ." The boy was chipping wood in a corner and the crystal chandelier tinkled, shuddering, with every blow. The Lavrovs had moved into the room vacated by their daughter; they had shared a garret with two other families in a workers' tenement; they had been glad to make the change.

Galina Petrovna asked: "Isn't Leo home?"

"No," said Kira, "I'm expecting him."

"I'm on my way to evening classes," said Galina Petrovna, "and I just dropped in for a minute . . ." She hesitated, fingered her bundle, smiled apologetically, and said too casually: "I just dropped in to show you something, see if you like it . . . maybe you'll want to . . . buy it."

"To buy it?" Kira repeated, astonished. "What is it, Mother?"

Galina Petrovna had unwrapped the bundle; she was holding an old-fashioned gown of flowing white lace; its long train touched the floor; Galina Petrovna's hesitant smile was almost shy.

"Why, Mother!" Kira gasped. "Your wedding gown!"

"You see," Galina Petrovna explained very quickly, "it's the school. I got my salary yesterday and . . . and they had deducted so much for my membership in the Proletarian Society of Chemical Defense—and I didn't even know I was a member—that I haven't . . . You see, your father needs new shoes—the cobbler's refused to mend his old ones—and I was going to buy them this month . . . but with the Chemical Defense and . . . You see, you could alter it nicely—the dress, I mean—it's good material, I've only worn it . . . once. . . . And I thought, if you liked it, for an evening gown, maybe, or . . ."

"Mother," Kira said almost severely, and wondered at the

"Where's the maid?" Leo asked.

"She had to go. We waited, but you're late, Leo."

"That's all right. We had dinner at a restaurant, Tonia and I. You haven't changed your mind, have you, Kira? Will you go with us to that opening?"

"I'm sorry, Leo, I can't. I have a guides' meeting tonight. . . . And, Leo, are you sure you want to go? This is the third night club opening in two weeks."

"This is different," said Antonina Pavlovna. "This is a real casino, just like abroad. Just like Monte Carlo."

"Leo," Kira sighed helplessly, "gambling again?"

He laughed: "Why not? We don't have to worry if we lose a few hundreds, do we, Tonia?"

Antonina Pavlovna smiled, pointing her chin forward: "Certainly not. We just left Koko, Kira Alexandrovna." She lowered her voice confidentially. "There's another shipment of white flour coming from Syerov day after tomorrow. How that boy can handle his business! I admire him tremendously."

"I'll jump into my dinner jacket," Leo said. "It won't take me a second. Do you mind turning to the window for a moment, Tonia?"

"Certainly," Antonina Pavlovna smiled coquettishly, "I do mind. But I promise not to peek, no matter how much I'd love to."

She stood at the window, putting a friendly hand on Kira's shoulder. "Poor Koko!" Antonina Pavlovna sighed. "He works so much. He has a meeting tonight—the Food Trust's Employees' Educational Circle. He's vice-secretary. He has to keep up his social activity, you know." She winked significantly. "He has so many meetings and sessions and things. I'd positively wilt of loneliness if our dear Leo wasn't gallant enough to take me out once in a while."

Kira looked at Leo's tall black figure in his immaculate dinner clothes, as she had looked at herself in the medieval wedding gown: as if he were a being from many centuries away, and it seemed strange to see him standing by the table with the Primus.

He took Antonina Pavlovna's arm with a gesture that belonged in a foreign film scene, and they left. When the door had closed behind them in Lavrov's room, Kira heard Lavrov's wife grunting: "And they say private traders don't make no money."

"Dietatorship of the Proletariat!" Lavrov growled and spat loudly.

Kira put on her old coat. She was not going to the excursion guides' meeting. She was going to the pavilion in a lonely palace garden.

*

A fire was burning in Andrei's fireplace. The logs creaked with sharp little explosions, long hulks broken into checks of an even, transparent, luminous red, and little orange flames swayed, fluttering, meeting, curving softly, dying suddenly, leaping up again, little blue tongues licking glowing coals; over the logs, as if suspended motionless in the air, long red flames tapered into the darkness of the chimney; yellow sparks shot upward, dying against black sooted bricks. An orange glow danced, trembling, on the white brocaded walls, on the posters of Red soldiers, smokestacks and tractors. One of Leda's feet drooped over the edge of the mantelpiece, its toes pink in the glow.

Kira sat on a box before the fireplace. Andrei sat at her feet, his face was buried in her knees; his hand caressed slowly the silken arch of her foot; his fingers dropped to the floor and came back to her tight silk stocking.

"... and then, when you're here," he whispered, "it's worth all the torture, all the waiting. . . . And then I don't have to think any more. . . ."

He raised his head. He looked at her and pronounced words she had never heard from him before: "I'm so tired. . . ."

She held his head, her two hands spread on his temples. She asked: "What's the matter, Andrei?"

He turned away, to the fire. He said: "My Party." Then he whirled back to her. "You know it, Kira. Perhaps you knew it long ago. You were right. Perhaps you're right about many things, those things we've tried not to discuss."

She whispered: "Andrei, do you want to discuss it—with me? I don't want to hurt you."

"You can't hurt me. Don't you think I can see it all, myself? Don't you think I know what that great revolution of ours has come to? We shoot one speculator and a hundred others hire taxis on Nevsky every evening. We raze villages to the ground, we fire machine guns into rows of peasants crazed with misery, when they kill a Communist. And ten of the avenged victim's Party brothers drink champagne at the home of a man with diamond studs in his shirt. Where did he get the diamonds? Who's paying for the champagne? We don't look into that too closely."

"Andrei, did you ever think that it was you—your Party—who drove the men you call speculators into what they are doing—because you left them no choice?"

"I know it. . . . We were to raise men to our own level. But they don't rise, the men we're ruling, they don't grow, they're shrinking. They're shrinking to a level no human creatures ever reached before. And we're sliding slowly down into their ranks. We're crumbling, like a wall, one by one. Kira, I've never been afraid. I'm afraid, now. It's a strange feeling. I'm afraid to think. Because . . . because I think, at times, that perhaps our ideals have had no other result."

"That's true! The fault was not in men, but in the nature of your ideals. And I . . . No, Andrei, I won't speak about it. I wish I could help you. But of all people, I'm the one who can help you least. You know it."

He laughed softly: "But you are helping me, Kira. You're the only one in this whole world who's helping me."

She whispered: "Why?"

"Because, no matter what happens, I still have you. Because, no matter what human wreckage I see around me, I still have you. And—in you—I still know what a human being can be."

"Andrei," she whispered, "are you sure you know me?"

He whispered, his lips in her hand so that she heard the words as if she were gathering them, one by one, in the hollow of her palm: "Kira, the highest thing in a man is not his god. It's that in him which knows the reverence due a god. And you, Kira, are my highest reverence. . . ."

*

"It's me," a voice whispered behind the door, "Marisha. Let me in, Irina."

Irina unlocked the door, cautiously, uncertainly. Marisha stood on the threshold with a loaf of bread in her hand.

"Here," she whispered, "I brought you something to eat. Both of you."

"Marisha!" Irina screamed.

"Keep quiet!" Marisha whispered with a cautious glance down the corridor. "Sure, I know. But don't worry. My mouth's shut. Here, take this. It's my own bread ration. No one will notice. I know why you didn't eat any breakfast this morning. But you can't keep that up."

Irina seized her arm, jerked her into the room, closed the door and giggled hysterically: "I . . . You see . . . oh,

Marisha, I didn't expect it of you to . . ." Her head hung over one eye; the other eye was full of tears.

Marisha whispered: "I know how it is. Hell! You love him. . . . Well, I don't know anything officially, so I don't have to tell anything, if they ask me? But for God's sake don't keep him here long. I'm not so sure about Victor."

"Do you think he . . . suspects?"

"I don't know. He's acting mighty queer. And if he knows—I'm afraid of him, Irina."

"It's just till tonight," Irina whispered, "he's leaving . . . tonight."

"I'll try to watch Victor for you."

"Marisha . . . I can't thank you . . . I . . ."

"Oh, hell! Nothing to cry about."

"I'm not crying . . . I . . . It's just . . . I haven't slept for two nights and . . . Marisha, you're so . . . I thank you and . . ."

"Oh, that's all right. Well, so long. I won't hang around

"Darling, I'm so glad!" She laughed soundlessly. "I really think I've saved you. They've arrested everyone of your group. I've pumped that out of Victor. Everyone but you."

"But if . . ."

"Oh, we're safe now. Just a few more hours to wait." She crouched on a box by his side, dropping her head on his shoulder, brushing the hair out of her feverish, sparkling eyes. "Then, when you get abroad, be sure and write to me the very first day, remember? The very first."

"Sure," he said dully.

"Then I'll manage to get out somehow. And just think of it! Abroad! We'll go to a night club and you'll look so funny in full dress clothes! Really, I think the tailors will refuse to fit you."

"Probably," he said, trying to smile.

"And then we'll see girls dancing in funny costumes, just like the ones I draw. And think! I can get a job designing fashions and costumes and stage sets. No more posters for me. Not a single poster! I won't draw another proletarian so long as I live!"

"I hope so."

"But, you know, I must warn you. I'm a very bad house-keeper. Really, I'll be impossible to live with. Your steak will be burned for dinner—oh, yes, we'll have steak every day!—and your socks won't be darned, and I won't let you complain. If you try to—I'll batter the life out of you, you poor little helpless, delicate creature!" She laughed hysterically, and buried her face on his shoulder, and bit his shirt, for her laughter was slipping into sounds that were not laughter.

He kissed her hair; he whispered bravely: "I won't complain at all if you can go ahead with your drawing. That's one more crime I'll never forgive this country. I think you could be a great artist. And listen, do you know that you've never given me a drawing, and I've asked you so often?"

"Oh, yes!" she sighed. "I've promised them to so many people, but I never concentrate long enough to finish one properly. Here's a promise, though: I'll draw two dozen pictures—there, abroad—and you can stick them all over the walls of our house. Sasha, *our house!*"

His arms closed tightly over a trembling body with a tousled head turned away from him.

*

"This mush," said Victor, "is burned."

"I'm sorry," Irina muttered, "I guess I didn't watch it closely and I . . ."

"Is there anything else for lunch?"

"No, Victor, I'm sorry. There's nothing in the house and . . ."

"There's never anything in this house! Funny, how the food seems to have disappeared—these last few days."

"No more than usual," said Marisha. "And remember, I didn't get my bread ration this week."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"I was too busy to stand in line and . . ."

"Why couldn't Irina get it?"

"Victor," said Vasili Ivanovitch, "your sister is not feeling well."

"So I notice."

"I'll eat your mush, if you don't want it," said Acia, reaching for his plate.

"You've had enough, Acia," Irina protested. "You have to hurry back to school."

"Oh, hell!" said Acia.

"Acia! Where did you learn such language?"

"I don't wanna go back," Acia whined. "We've gotta decorate Lenin's Nook this afternoon. Oh, I hate gluing pictures outta magazines on their old red blotters. I got bawled out twice, 'cause I get them on crooked."

"You hurry and get your coat. You'll be late."

Acia sighed with a resigned glance at the empty lunch dishes and shuffled out.

Victor leaned back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, and looked at Irina closely. "Not going to work today, Irina?" he asked casually.

"No. I've telephoned them. I don't feel well. I think I have a temperature."

"It's better not to take the chance of going out in this awful weather," said Marisha. "Look at it snowing."

"No," said Victor, "Irina shouldn't take chances."

"I'm not afraid," said Irina, "only I think it's safer to stay in."

"No," said Victor, "you've never been afraid of anything. A commendable trait—sometimes. And sometimes—it may go too far."

"Just what do you mean?"

"You really should be more careful—of your health. Why don't you call a doctor?"

"Oh, it's not necessary. I'm not that bad. I'll be all right in a few days."

"Yes, I think so," said Vietor, rising.

"Where are you going today, Vietor?" Marisha asked.

"Why do you have to know?"

"Oh, nothing . . . I . . . well . . . You see, I thought if you weren't too busy, I'd like you to come over to my Club and say a few words about something. They've all heard about my prominent husband and I've promised to bring you to address them—you know, something on Electrification or modern airplanes or something."

"Sorry," said Vietor, "some other time. I've got to see a man today. About a job. About that job on the dam."

"May I go with you, Vietor?"

"Certainly not. What's this? Checking up on me? Jealous or something?"

"Oh, no, no, darling. No. Nothing."

"Well, then, shut up. I'm not going to have a wife tagging me around."

"Are you looking for a new job, Victor?" Vasili Ivanovitch d.

Well, what do you think? Think I'll settle down to a rationed slave's drudgery for the rest of my life? Well, you'll see."

*

"Are you sure?" the official asked.

"I'm sure," said Vietor.

"Who else is responsible?"

"No one. Just my sister."

"Who else lives in your apartment, Comrade Dunaev?"

"My wife, my father, and my little sister—she's just a child. My father doesn't suspect a thing. My wife is a scatter-brained creature who wouldn't notice anything right under her nose. And anyway, she's a member of the Komsomol. There are also tenants, but they never come in contact with our side of the apartment."

"I see. Thank you, Comrade Dunaev."

"I'm merely doing my duty."

The official rose and extended his hand. "Comrade Dunaev, in the name of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, I thank you for your courage. They are still few, those whose devotion to the State rises above all personal ties of blood and family. That is an attitude of the future, toward which we are trying to educate our backward people. That is the highest

proof of loyalty a Party man can give. I shall see to it that your heroism does not remain unknown."

"I do not deserve this high praise, comrade," said Victor. "The only value of my example is in showing our Party that the family is an institution of the past, which should not be considered when judging a member's loyalty to our great Collective."

VIII

The door bell rang.

Irina shuddered and dropped her newspaper. Marisha lowered her book.

"I'll open it," said Victor, rising.

Irina looked at the dining-room clock. One hour was left before the train's departure. And Victor had not gone to the Party meeting; and he would not leave the house.

Vasili Ivanovitch was carving a paper knife, sitting by the window. Acia yelled from somewhere under the table, rustling old magazines: "Say, is this a picture of Lenin? I gotta cut out ten of them for the Nook and I can't find that many. Is this Lenin or is it a Czechoslovakian general? I'll be damned if I can . . ."

They heard the steps of many heavy boots in the lobby. The door was thrown open. A man in a leather jacket stood on the threshold, a slip of paper in his hand. Two soldiers in peaked caps stood behind him, their hands on the butts of the guns at their belts. A third one stood at the entrance door in the lobby, holding a bayonet.

They heard a scream; it came from Marisha. She jumped up, pressing both hands to her mouth. Vasili Ivanovitch rose slowly. Acia stared up from under the table, her mouth hanging open. Irina stood very straight, too straight, leaning back a little.

"Search warrant," said the man in the leather jacket, throwing the paper on the table, and motioning to his soldiers. "This way!"

They walked down the corridor to Irina's room.

WE THE LIVING

they threw the closet door open. Sasha stood on the threshold, looking at them with a somber grin. Vasili Ivanovitch gasped, in the corridor, behind the soldiers. Acia yelled: "Oh, God! That's why she wouldn't let me . . ." Marisha kicked her ankles. A drawing on the edge of a table slid down, rustling, fluttering to the floor. "Which one is the Citizen Irina Dunaeva?" asked the man in the leather jacket.

"I am," said Irina. "Listen," Sasha jerked forward. "She had nothing to do with it . . . she . . . it's not her fault. . . . I threatened her and . . ."

"With what?" the man in the leather jacket asked, his voice expressionless.

A soldier ran his hands swiftly down Sasha's clothes. "No weapons," he reported.

"All right," said the man in the leather jacket. "Take him down to the car. The Citizen Dunaeva, too. And the old man. Search the apartment."

"Comrade," Vasili Ivanovitch approached the leader, his voice steady, his hands shaking. "Comrade, my daughter couldn't be guilty of . . ."

"You'll have a chance to talk later," said the man and turned to Victor. "Are you a Party member?"

"Yes," said Victor.

"Your card?" Victor showed his Party card. The man pointed to Marisha: "Your wife?"

"Yes."
"All right. These two can stay. Get your coats, citizens." On the floor, melting snow trailed the soldiers' boots. A lamplight with a shade that had slipped sideways, threw a broken patch of light into the corridor, on Marisha's face, greenish-white with sunken eyes staring at Victor.

The soldier on guard in the lobby opened the door to admit the Upravdom. The Upravdom's coat was thrown hurriedly over his shoulders, over a dirty, unbuttoned shirt. He wailed, clutching his fingers with a dry little crackle of stretched joints: "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Oh, my God! . . . Comrade Commissar, I knew nothing about this. Comrade Commissar, I swear. . . ." The soldier slammed the door in the faces of curious neighbors gathered on the stair-landing.

Irina kissed Acia and Marisha. Victor approached her, face frozen in anxious concern: "Irina, I'm so sorry. . . . I don't understand. . . . I'll see what I can do and . . ."

Her eyes stopped him; they were looking at him fixedly; they looked suddenly like the eyes of Maria Petrovna in the old portrait. She turned and followed the soldiers, without a word. She went first; Sasha and Vasili Ivanovitch followed.

*

Vasili Ivanovitch was released in three days.

Sasha Chernov was sentenced to ten years in a Siberian prison, for counter-revolutionary activity.

Irina Dunaeva was sentenced to ten years in a Siberian prison, for assisting a counter-revolutionary.

Vasili Ivanovitch tried to see officials, got a few letters of introduction to a few assistant secretaries, spent hours huddled in the corners of unheated waiting rooms, made telephone calls, trying to keep his voice from trembling. Nothing could be done and he knew it.

When he came home, he did not speak to Victor. He did not look at Victor. He did not ask for Victor's help.

Marisha, alone, greeted Vasili Ivanovitch when he came home. She said timidly: "Here, Vasili Ivanovitch, have some dinner. I cooked the noodle soup you like—for you, specially." She blushed, grateful and embarrassed, when he answered with a silent, absent-minded smile.

Vasili Ivanovitch saw Irina in a cell of the G.P.U. He locked himself in his room for many hours and cried silently, happily, on the day when he arranged for her last request to be granted. She had asked permission to marry Sasha before they were sent away.

The wedding was performed in a bare hall of the G.P.U. Armed guards stood at the door. Vasili Ivanovitch and Kira were the witnesses. Sasha's lips twitched. Irina was very calm. She had been calm ever since her arrest. She looked a little thinner, a little paler; her skin seemed transparent; her eyes too big; her fingers were steady on Sasha's arm. She raised her face for his kiss after the ceremony, with a tender, compassionate smile.

The official whom Vasili Ivanovitch saw on the following day said: "Well, you got what you wanted. Only I don't see what good that fool rigmarole will do them. Don't you know that their prisons are three hundred and fifty kilometers apart?"

"No," said Vasili Ivanovitch and sat down heavily. "I didn't know that."

But Irina had expected it. That had been the re-

wedding; she had hoped it would influence the decision. It had not.

*

It was Vasili Ivanovitch's last crusade. No one could appeal a sentence of the G.P.U. But a prison assignment could be changed; if he could get the proper influence, the proper connections. . . . Vasili Ivanovitch rose at dawn. Marisha forced him to swallow a cup of black coffee, stopping him in the lobby on his way out, pushing the mug into his hands, trembling in her long nightgown. Night found him in a casino lobby, pushing his way through a crowd, crumpling his hat in both hands, stopping an imposing figure he had been expecting for hours, saying softly: "Comrade Commissar . . . just a few words . . . please . . . Comrade Commissar . . ." He was thrown out by an attendant in uniform, once, and lost his hat.

He made appointments and obtained interviews. He entered a solemn office, his old, patched coat brushed thoroughly, his shoes shined, his white hair parted neatly. He stood before a desk, and his tall shoulders that had carried a heavy rifle through many dark nights, through many Siberian forests, many years ago, sagged helplessly. He looked into a stern face and said:

"Comrade Commissar, that's all I ask. Just that. It's not much, is it? Just send them to the same place. I know they've been counter-revolutionaries and you have a right to punish them. I'm not complaining, Comrade Commissar. It's ten years, you know, but that's all right. Only send them to the same place. What difference does it make to you? What difference does it make to the State? They're so young. They love each other. It's ten years, but you know and I know that they'll never come back—it's Siberia, and the cold and the hunger, and the conditions . . ."

"What's that?" a stern voice interrupted him.

"Comrade Commissar, I . . . I didn't mean anything . . . No . . . I didn't mean . . . Only suppose they get sick or something? Irina is not very strong. They're not sentenced to death. And while they're alive—couldn't you let them be together? It would mean so much to them—and so little to anyone else. I'm an old man, Comrade Commissar, and she's my daughter. I know Siberia. It would help me, if I knew that she wasn't alone—there—that she had a man with her, her husband. I'm not sure I know how to ask you, Comrade Commissar, but you must forgive me. You see, I've never asked a favor

in my life. You probably think that I'm indignant and hate you all in my heart. But I don't. I won't. Just do that one thing—that last thing—send them to the same prison—and I'll bless you as long as I live."

He was refused.

*

"I heard the whole story," said Andrei, when Kira spoke to him about it. "Do you know who denounced Irina?"

"No," said Kira, and turned away, and added: "I suspect it, though. Don't tell me. I don't want to hear it."

"I won't."

"I didn't want to ask for your help, Andrei. I know I can't expect you to intercede for a counter-revolutionary, but couldn't you ask them to change her prison assignment and have them sent to the same place? It wouldn't be treason on your part, and it really makes no difference to your officials."

He held her hand and said: "Certainly. I'll try."

In an office of the G.P.U., the executive looked at Andrei coldly and asked:

"Pleading for a . . . relative, aren't you, Comrade Taganov?"

"I don't understand you, comrade," Andrei answered slowly, looking straight at him.

"Oh, yes, I think you do. And I think you should understand that keeping a mistress who is the daughter of a former factory owner, is not the best way to strengthen your Party standing. . . . Don't look startled, Comrade Taganov. You really didn't think it was unknown to us, did you? And you working in the G.P.U.! You surprise me."

"My personal affairs . . ."

"Your *what kind* of affairs, Comrade Taganov?"

"If you're speaking of Citizen Argounova . . ."

"I *am* speaking of Citizen Argounova. And I'd suggest that you use some of the methods and authority which your position gives you, to investigate Citizen Argounova a little—for your own sake, while we're on the subject."

"I know everything I have to know about Citizen Argounova. You don't have to bring her into this. She is absolutely blameless politically."

"Oh, *politically*? And in other respects?"

"If you're speaking as my superior, I refuse to listen to anything about Citizen Argounova except her political standing."

"Very well. I don't have to say anything. I was speaking merely as a friend. You should be careful, Comrade Taganov. You don't have many friends left—in the Party."

Andrei could do nothing to change Irina's sentence.

*

"Hell!" said Leo, dipping his head into a basin of cold water, for he had come home very late the night before, "I'm going to see that skunk Syerov. He has a big boy friend in the G.P.U. He'll have to do something if I tell him to."

"I wish you'd try, Leo," said Kira.

"The damned sadists! What difference should it make to them if the poor kids rot together in their infernal prison? They know they'll never come back alive."

"Don't tell him that, Leo. Ask him nicely."

"I'll ask him *nicely*!"

In Pavel Syerov's outer office, the secretary sat typing intently, biting her lower lip. Ten visitors were waiting before the wooden railing. Leo walked straight through the office, swung the little gate open and threw at the secretary:

"I want to see Comrade Syerov. At once."

"But, citizen," the secretary gasped, "you're not allowed to . . ."

"I said I want to see him at once."

"Comrade Syerov is very busy, citizen, and there are all these citizens here waiting, and he can't see you out of turn . . ."

"You go and tell him it's Lev Kovalensky. He'll see me fast enough."

The secretary rose and backed into Syerov's office, staring at Leo, as if she expected him to draw a gun. She returned, looking more frightened, and said, gulping: "Go right in, Citizen Kovalensky."

When the door closed and they were alone, Pavel Syerov jumped up and hissed at Leo, his voice a muffled roar: "You damn fool! Are you insane? How dare you come here?"

Leo laughed, his icy laughter that was like a master's hand slapping an insolent slave's face. "You're not speaking to me, are you?" he asked. "Particularly when you're worried about caution?"

"Get out of here! I can't talk to you here!"

"You don't have to," said Leo, sitting down comfortably. "I'll do the talking."

"Do you realize whom you're talking to? You're demented or else I've never seen insolence in my life!"

"Repeat that to yourself," said Leo, "with my compliments."

"Hell!" said Syerov, dropping into his chair. "What do you want?"

"You have a friend in the G.P.U."

"I'm glad you remember that."

"I do. That's why I'm here. I have two friends sentenced to ten years in Siberia. They've just been married. They're being sent to prisons hundreds of kilometers apart. I want you to see that they're sent together, to the same place."

"Uh-huh," said Pavel Syerov. "I've heard about the case. A beautiful example of Party loyalty on the part of Comrade Victor Dunaev."

"Don't you think it's slightly ludicrous, *you* talking of Party loyalty to *me*?"

"Well, what are you going to do, if I don't lift a finger about the case?"

"You know," said Leo. "I could do a lot."

"Sure," said Syerov complaisantly. "I know you could. I also know you won't. Because, you see, to drown me, you'd have to be the stone tied around my neck, and I don't think you'll go that far in your noble unselfishness."

"Listen," said Leo, "drop the official pose. We're both crooks, and you know it, and we hate each other, and we both know it, but we're in the same boat and it's not a very steady one. Don't you think it would be wiser if we helped each other as much as we could?"

"Yes, I sure do. And your part of it is to keep as far away from here as you can. And if you weren't so damn blinded by your old patrician arrogance, which it's about time to forget, you'd know better than to ask me to intercede for any cousins of yours, which would be as good as posting on a poster my exact connection with you."

"You damn coward!"

"Well, maybe I am. And maybe it would do you good to acquire some of the same quality. You'd better not come around demanding any favors from me. You'd better remember that even if we are chained together—for the time being—I have more opportunities than you to break the chain."

Leo rose. At the door he turned and said: "As you wish. Only it would have been wiser of you—in case the chain is ever in my hands. . . ."

"Yes. And it would have been wiser of you if you hadn't come here—in case it's ever in mine. . . . And listen," he lowered his voice, "you can do something for me and you'd better do it. Tell that hog Morozov to send the money. He's late again on the last deal. I told him I'm not to be kept waiting."

*

Marisha said hesitantly, trying not to look at Victor: "Listen, don't you think that if I saw someone and asked . . . You know, just to send them to the same prison . . . it wouldn't make any difference to anyone . . . and . . ."

Victor seized her wrist and swung her around so savagely that she squealed with pain. "Listen," he said through his teeth, "you keep as far out of it as your fool legs will carry you. It would be fine for me, wouldn't it? My wife begging for counter-revolutionaries!"

"But it's only . . ."

"Listen! You breathe only one word—understand?—just one to any friend of yours—and you'll get a divorce notice the next morning!"

That night, Vasili Ivanovitch came home, looking calmer than usual. He took off his coat and folded his gloves neatly, meticulously on the mirror-stand in the lobby. He did not look at the dinner Marisha had set out for him in the dining room. He said: "Victor, I want to speak to you."

Victor followed him reluctantly to his office.

Vasili Ivanovitch did not sit down. He stood, his hands hanging limply by his sides, and looked at his son.

"Victor," said Vasili Ivanovitch, "you know what I might say. But I won't say it. I won't ask any questions. It's a strange time we're living in. Many years ago, I felt sure of what I thought. I knew when I was right and I knew when to condemn. I can't do it now. I don't know whether I can condemn anyone for anything. There's so much horror and suffering around us that I don't want to brand anyone as guilty. We're poor, bewildered creatures—all of us—who suffer so much and know so little! I can't blame you for anything you might have done. I don't know your reasons. I won't ask. I know I won't understand. No one understands each other these days. You're my son, Victor. I love you. I can't help it, as you can't help being what you are. You see, I've wanted a son ever since I was younger than you are now. I've never trusted men. And so I wanted a man of my own, at whom I could

look proudly, directly, as I'm looking at you now. When you were a little boy, Victor, you cut your finger, once, a deep cut, clear to the bone. You came in from the garden to have it bandaged. Your lips were blue, but you didn't cry. You didn't make a sound. Your mother was so angry at me because I laughed happily. But, you see, I was proud of you. I knew I would always be proud of you. . . . You know, you were so funny, when your mother made you wear a velvet suit with a big lace collar. You were so angry—and so pretty! You had curly hair . . . Well, all that doesn't matter. It's only that I can't say anything against you, Victor. I can't think anything against you. So I won't question you. I'll only ask you for one favor: you can't save your sister, I know it; but ask your friends—I know you have friends who can do it—just ask them to have her sent to the same prison with Sasha. Just that. It won't interfere with the sentence and it won't compromise you. It's one last favor to her—a death-bed favor, Victor, for you know you'll never see her again. Just do that—and the book will be closed. I'll never look back. I'll never try to read some of the pages which I don't want to see. That will settle all our accounts. I'll still go on having a son, and even if it's hard, sometimes, not to think, one can do it, these days, one has to, and you'll help me. Just one favor, in exchange for . . . in exchange for all that's past."

"Father," said Victor, "you must believe me, I'd do anything in my power, if I could. . . . I've tried, but . . ."

"Victor, we won't argue. I'm not asking whether you can do it. I know you can. Don't explain. Just say yes or no. Only, if it's no, Victor, then it's the end for you and me. Then I have no son any longer. There's a limit, Victor, to how much I can forgive."

"But, Father, it is thoroughly impossible, and . . ."

"Victor, I said if it's no, I have no son any longer. Think of how much I've lost these last few years. Now what is the answer?"

"I can do nothing."

Vasili Ivanovitch straightened his shoulders slowly, the two lines that cut his cheeks, from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth, looked set, firm, emotionless. He turned and walked to the door.

"Where are you going?" Victor asked.

"That," said Vasili Ivanovitch, "does not concern you any longer."

In the dining room, Marisha and Acia were sitting at the

table, staring at the plates of a cold dinner they had not touched.

"Acia," said Vasili Ivanovitch, "get your coat and hat."

"Father!" Marisha's chair clattered back as she leaped to her feet; it was the first time she had ever addressed that word to Vasili Ivanovitch.

"Marisha," Vasili Ivanovitch said gently, "I'll telephone you in a few days . . . when I find a place to live. Will you then send my things over . . . what's left of mine here?"

"You can't go!" said Marisha, her voice breaking. "With no job and no money and . . . This is your house."

"This is your husband's house," said Vasili Ivanovitch. "Come on, Acia."

"May I take my stamp collection along?" Acia muttered.

"Take your stamp collection along."

Marisha knelt on the window sill, her nose flattened against the glass, her back heaving in silent sobs, and watched them go. Vasili Ivanovitch's shoulders drooped and, under the street lantern, she could see the white patch of his bare neck, between the collar of his old coat and the black fur cap on his bowed head; he held Acia's hand, and her arm was stretched up to his, and she seemed very small next to his huge bulk; she shuffled obediently, heels first, through a brown slush, and clutched the big stamp album to her breast.

*

Kira saw Irina in a cell of the G.P.U. on the evening of her departure. Irina smiled calmly; her smile was soft, wondering; her eyes, in a face that looked like wax, stared at Kira gently, vaguely, as if fixed, with quiet astonishment, on something distant that she was struggling to understand.

"I'll send you mittens," said Kira, trying to smile, "woolen ones. Only I warn you, I'll knit them myself, so don't be surprised if you won't be able to wear them."

"No," said Irina, "but you can send me a snapshot. It will look nice: Kira Argounova knitting!"

"And you know," said Kira, "you've never given me that drawing you promised."

"That's right, I haven't. Father has them all. Tell him to let you select any that you want. Tell him I said so. Still, it's not what I promised you. I promised a real portrait of Leo."

"Well, we'll have to wait for that till you come back."

"Yes." Then she jerked her head and laughed. "It's nice of you, Kira, only you don't have to fool me. I'm not afraid."

but I know. Remember, when they sent those University students to Siberia? You don't hear of any of them coming back. It's the scurvy or consumption, or both. . . . Oh, it's all right. I know it."

"Irina . . ."

"Come on, we don't have to be emotional, even if it is the last time. . . . There's something I wanted to ask you, Kira. You don't have to answer, if you don't want to, it's just curiosity: what is there between you and Andrei Taganov?"

"I've been his mistress for over a year," said Kira. "You see, Leo's aunt in Berlin didn't . . ."

"It's just as I thought. Well, kid, I don't know which one of us needs more courage to face the future."

"I'll be afraid only on a day that will never come," said Kira. "The day when I give up."

"I've given up," said Irina, "and I'm not afraid. Only there's something I would like to understand. And I don't think anyone can explain it. You see, I know it's the end for me. I know it, but I can't quite believe it, I can't feel it. It's so strange. There's your life. You begin it, feeling that it's something so precious and rare, so beautiful that it's like a sacred treasure. Now it's over, and it doesn't make any difference to anyone, and it isn't that they are indifferent, it's just that they don't know, they don't know what it means, that treasure of mine, and there's something about it that they should understand. I don't understand it myself, but there's something that should be understood by all of us. Only what is it, Kira? What?"

*

Political convicts traveled in a separate car; men with bayonets stood at its doors. Irina and Sasha sat facing each other on hard wooden benches; they had traveled together part of the way, but they were approaching a junction where Irina was to be transferred to another train. The car windows were black and lustrous, as if sheets of dusty patent leather had been pasted behind the glass panes; only the fluffy, wet stars of snow, smashing against the glass, showed that there was an earth beyond the panes, and wind, and a black sky. A lantern trembled high under the ceiling, as if every knock of the wheels under the floor kicked the yellow flame out, and it fluttered and came back again, shivering, clutching the little stub of candle. A boy in an old green student's cap, alone by a window, sang softly, monotonously, through his teeth, and

his voice sounded as if he were grinning, although his cheeks were motionless:

*"Hey, little apple
Where are you rolling?"*

Sasha held Irina's hands. She was smiling, her chin buried in an old woolen scarf. Her hands were cold. A white vapor fluttered at her lips as she whispered: "We must not think of it as ten years. It sounds so long, doesn't it? But it really isn't. You know, some philosopher said that time is only an illusion or something like that. Who was it that said it? Well, it doesn't matter. Time can pass very quickly, if one stops thinking of it. We'll still be young, when we'll . . . when we'll be free. So let's promise each other not to think of anything else. Now, promise?"

"Yes," he whispered, looking at her hands. "Irina, if only I hadn't . . ."

"And that's something you've already promised me never to mention again, not even to yourself. Darling, don't you see that it's really easier for me—this way—than to have remained at home, with you sent here alone? This way, I'll feel that we have something in common, that we're sharing something. Aren't we?"

He buried his face in her hands and said nothing.

"And listen," she whispered, bending down to his blond hair, "I know it won't always be easy to remain cheerful. Sometimes one thinks: oh, what's the use of remaining brave just for one's pride's sake? So let's agree on this: we'll both be brave for each other. When you feel the worst, just smile—and think that you're doing something for me. And I'll do the same. That will keep us together. And you know, it's very important to remain cheerful. We'll last longer."

"What for?" he asked. "We won't last long enough anyway."

"Sasha, what nonsense!" She pulled his head up by a strand of hair, looking straight into his eyes, as if she believed her every word. "Two strong, healthy creatures like us! And, anyway, I'm sure those stories are exaggerated—if you mean the hunger and the consumption. Nothing is ever as bad as it's painted."

The wheels grated under the floor, slowing down.

"Oh, God!" Sasha moaned. "Is that the station?"

The car jerked forward and the wheels went on knocking under the floor, like a mallet striking faster and faster.

"No," Irina whispered breathlessly, "not yet."

The student by the window wailed, as if he were grinning, to the rhythm of the wheels:

*"Hey, little apple,
Where are you rolling?"*

And he repeated, slowly, biting into every word, as if the words were an answer to a question, and the question itself, and a deadly certainty of some silent thought of his own: "Hey . . . little . . . apple . . . where . . . are . . . you . . . rolling?"

Irina was whispering: "Listen, here's something we can do: we can look at the moon, sometimes—and, you know, it's the same moon everywhere—and we would be looking at the same thing together that way, you see?"

"Yes," said Sasha, "it will be nice."

"I was going to say the sun, but I don't suppose there will be much sun there, so . . ." A cough interrupted her; she coughed dully, shaking, pressing her hand to her mouth.

"Irina!" he cried. "What's that?"

"Nothing," she smiled, blinking, catching her breath. "Just a little cold I caught. Those G.P.U. cells weren't heated too well."

A lantern swam past the window. Then there was nothing but the silent snowflakes splattering against the glass, but they sat, frozen, staring at the window.

Irina whispered: "I think we're approaching."

Sasha sat up, erect, his face the color of brass, darker than his hair, and said, his voice changed, firm: "If they let us write to each other, Irina, will you . . . every day?"

"Of course," she answered gaily.

"Will you . . . draw things in your letters, too?"

"With pleasure. . . . Here," she picked a small splinter of coal from the window ledge, "here, I'll draw something for you, right now."

With a few strokes, swift and sure as a surgeon's scalpel, she sketched a face on the back of her seat, an imp's face that grinned at them with a wide, crescent mouth, with eyebrows flung up, with one eye winking mischievously, a silly, infectious, irresistible grin that one could not face without grinning in answer.

Here," said Irina, "he'll keep you company after . . . after station. . . ."

Sasha smiled, answering the imp's smile. And suddenly bowing his head back, clenching his fists, he cried, so that the student by the window shuddered and looked at him: "Why do they talk of honor, and ideals, and duty to one's country? Why do they teach us . . ."

"Darling, not so loud! Don't think useless thoughts. There are so many useless thoughts in the world!"

At the station, another train was waiting on a parallel track. Guards with bayonets escorted some of the prisoners out. Sasha held Irina, and her bones creaked in his huge arms, and he kissed her lips, her chin, her hair, her neck, and he made a sound that was not quite a moan and not quite a beast's growl. He whispered hoarsely, furiously, into her scarf, blushing, choking, words he had always been reluctant to utter: "I . . . I . . . I love you. . . ."

A guard touched her elbow; she tore herself away from Sasha and followed the guard down the aisle. At the door, Sasha pushed the guard aside, savagely, insanely, and seized Irina again, and held her, not kissing her, looking at her stupidly, his long hands crushing the body of the wife he had ever possessed.

The guard tore her away from him and pushed her out through the door. She leaned back for a second, for a last look at Sasha. She grinned at him, the homely, silly grin of her imp, her nose wrinkled, one eye winking mischievously. Then the door closed.

The two trains started moving at once. Pressed tightly to the glass pane, Sasha could see the black outline of Irina's head in the yellow square of a window in the car on the next track. The two trains rolled together, iron mallets striking faster and faster under the floor, the glow of the station swimming slowly back over the dark floor of the car that Sasha was watching. Then the grayish patch of snow between them grew wider. He could still touch the other train with his outstretched arm if the window were open, he thought; then he could still touch then he could reach it no longer, even were he to leap. He tore his eyes from that other window and watched the white stretch that was growing between them, his fingers the glass, as if he wanted to seize that white stretch and it, and pull with his whole strength, and stop it. The trains were flying farther and farther apart. At the level of his

he could now see the bluish, steely gleams of wheels whirling down narrow bands in the snow. Then he did not look at the snow any longer. His glance clung to the tiny yellow square with a black dot that was a human figure, far away. And as the yellow square shrank swiftly, his eyes would not let it go, and he felt his glance being pulled, stretched, with a pain as excruciating as a wrenched nerve. Across an endless waste of snow, two long caterpillars crawled apart; two thin, silvery threads preceded each; the threads led, disappearing, into a black void. Sasha lost sight of the window; but he could still see a string of yellow spots that still looked square, and above them something black moving against the sky, that looked like car roofs. Then there was only a string of yellow beads, dropping into a black well. Then, there was only the dusty glass pane with patent leather pasted behind it, and he was not sure whether he still saw a string of sparks somewhere or whether it was something burned into his unblinking, dilated eyes.

Then there was only the imp left, on the back of the empty seat before him, grinning with a wide, crescent mouth, one eye winking.

IX

Comrade Victor Dunaev, one of our youngest and most brilliant engineers, has been assigned to a job on the Volkhovstroy, the great hydroelectric project of the Soviet Union. It is a responsible post, never held previously by one of his years.

The clipping from *Pravda* lay in Victor's glistening new brief case, along with a similar one from the *Krasnaya Gazeta*, and, folded carefully between them, a clipping from the Moscow *Izvestia*, even though it was only one line about "Comrade V. Dunaev."

Victor carried the brief case when he left for the construction site on Lake Volkhov, a few hours ride from Petrograd. A delegation from his Party Club came to see him off at the station. He made a short, effective speech about the future of proletarian construction, from the platform of the car, and

forgot to kiss Marisha when the train started moving. The speech was reproduced in the Club's Wall Newspaper on the following day.

Marisha had to remain in Petrograd; she had her course at the Rabfac to finish and her social activities; she had suggested timidly that she would be willing to give them up and accompany Victor; but he had insisted on her remaining in the city. "My dear, we must not forget," he had told her, "that our social duties come first, above all personal considerations."

He had promised to come home whenever he was back in the city. She saw him once, unexpectedly, at a Party meeting. He explained hurriedly that he could not come home with her, for he had to take the midnight train back to the construction site. She said nothing, even though she knew that there was no midnight train.

She had developed a tendency to be too silent. At the Kom-somol meetings, she made her reports in a strident, indifferent voice. When caught off guard, she sat staring vacantly ahead, her eyes puzzled.

She was left alone in the big, empty rooms of the Dunaev apartment. Victor had talked intimately to a few influential officials, and no tenants had been ordered to occupy their vacant rooms. But the silence of the apartment frightened Marisha, so she spent her evenings with her family, in her old room, next to Kira's.

When Marisha appeared, her mother sighed and muttered some complaint about the rations at the co-operative, and bent silently over her mending. Her father said: "Good evening," and gave no further sign of noticing her presence. Her little brother said: "You here again?" She had nothing to say. She sat in a corner behind the grand piano, reading a book until late at night; then she said: "Guess I'll be going," and went home.

One evening, she saw Kira crossing the room hurriedly on her way out. Marisha leaped to her feet, smiling eagerly, hopefully, although she did not know why, nor what she hoped for, nor whether she had anything to say to Kira. She made a timid step forward and stopped: Kira had not noticed her and had gone out. Marisha sat down slowly, still smiling vacantly.

*

Snow had come early. It grew by Petrograd's sidewalks in craggy mountain ranges, veined with thin, black threads of

soot, spotted with brown clods and cigarette stubs and greenish, fading rags of newspapers. But under the walls of the houses, snow grew slowly, undisturbed, soft, white, billowing, pure as cotton, rising to the top panes of basement windows.

Above the streets, window sills hung as white, overloaded shelves. Cornices sparkled, trimmed with the glass lace of long icicles. Into an icy, summer-blue sky little billows of pink smoke rose slowly, melting like petals of apple blossoms.

High on the roofs, snow gathered into menacing white walls behind iron railings. Men in heavy mittens swung shovels high over the city and hurled huge, frozen white clods, as rocks, down to the pavements below; they crashed with a dull thud and a thin white cloud. Sleighs whirled sharply to avoid them; hungry sparrows, their feathers fluffed, scattered from under the muffled, thumping hoofs.

On street corners, huge cauldrons stood encased in boxes of unpainted boards. Men with shovels swung the snow up into the cauldrons, and narrow streams of dirty water gurgled from under the furnaces, running by the curb, long black threads cutting white streets.

At night, the furnaces blazed open in the darkness, little purplish-orange fires low over the ground, and ragged men slipped out of the night, bending to extend frozen hands into the red glow.

Kira walked soundlessly through the palace garden. A narrow track of footprints, half-buried under a fresh white powder, led through the deep snow to the pavilion; Andrei's footprints, she knew; few visitors ever crossed that garden. Tree trunks stood bare, black and dead like telegraph poles. The palace windows were dark; but, far at the end of the garden, showing through the stiff, naked branches, a bright yellow square hung in the darkness and a little patch of snow was golden-pink under Andrei's window.

She rose slowly up the long marble stairway. There was no light; her foot searched uncertainly for every frozen, slippery step. It was colder than in the street outside, the dead, damp, still cold of a mausoleum. Hesitantly, her hand followed the broken marble rail. She could see nothing ahead; it seemed as if the steps would never end.

When she came to a break in the railing, she stopped. She called helplessly, with a little note of laughter in her frightened voice: "Andrei!"

A wedge of light split the darkness above as he

open. "Oh, Kira!" He rushed down to her, laughing apologetically: "I'm so sorry! It's those broken electric wires."

He swung her up into his arms and carried her to his room, while she laughed: "I'm sorry, Andrei, I'm getting to be such a helpless coward!"

He carried her to the blazing fireplace. He took off her coat and hat, his fingers wet with snow melting on her fur collar. He made her sit down by the fire, removed her mittens and rubbed her cold fingers between his strong palms; he unfastened her new felt overshoes, and took them off, shaking snow that sizzled on the bright red coals.

Then he turned silently, took a long, narrow box, dropped it in her lap and stood watching her, smiling. She asked: "What is this, Andrei?"

"Something from abroad."

She tore the paper and opened the box. Her mouth fell open without a sound. The box held a nightgown of black chiffon, so transparent that she saw the flames of the fireplace dancing through its thin black folds, as she held it high in frightened, incredulous fingers. "Andrei . . . where did you get that?"

"From a smuggler."

"Andrei! *You*—buying from a smuggler?"

"Why not?"

"From an . . . illegal speculator?"

"Oh, why not? I wanted it. I knew you'd want it."

"But there was a time when . . ."

"There was. Not now." Her fingers wrinkled the black chiffon as if they were empty. "Well?" he asked. "Don't you like it?"

"Oh, Andrei!" she moaned. "Andrei! Do they wear things like that abroad?"

"Evidently."

"Black underwear? How—oh, how silly and how lovely!"

"That's what they do abroad. They're not afraid of doing silly things that are lovely. They consider it reason enough to do things because they're lovely."

She laughed: "Andrei, they'd throw you out of the Party if they heard you say that."

"Kira, would you like to go abroad?"

The black nightgown fell to the floor. He smiled calmly, bending to pick it up: "I'm sorry. Did I frighten you, Kira?"

"What . . . what did you say?"

"Listen!" He was kneeling suddenly by her side, his arms around her, his eyes intent with a reckless eagerness she had

never seen in them before. "It's an idea I've had for some time . . . at first, I thought it was insane, but it keeps coming back to me. . . . Kira, we could . . . You understand? Abroad . . . forever. . . ."

"But, Andrei . . ."

"It can be done. I could still manage to be sent there, get an assignment, some secret mission for the G.P.U. I'd get you a passport to go as my secretary. Once across the border—we'd drop the assignment, and our Red passports, and our names. We'd run away so far they'd never find us."

"Andrei, do you know what you're saying?"

"Yes. Only I don't know what I'd do there. I don't know—yet. I don't dare to think about it, when I'm alone. But I can think of it, I can talk of it when you're here with me. I want to escape before I see too much of what I see around us. To break with all of it at once. It would be like starting again, from the beginning, from a total void. But I'd have you. The rest doesn't matter. I'd grow to understand what I'm just beginning to learn from you now."

"Andrei," she stammered, "you, who were the best your Party had to offer the world . . ."

"Well, say it. Say I'm a traitor. Maybe I am. And maybe I've just stopped being one. Maybe I've been a traitor—all these years—to something greater than what the Party ever offered the world. I don't know. I don't care. I feel as if I were naked, naked and empty and clear. Because, you see, I feel certain of nothing in that involved mess they call existence, of nothing but you." He noticed the look in her eyes and asked softly: "What's the matter, Kira? Have I said anything to frighten you?"

She whispered without looking at him: "No, Andrei."

"It's only what I said once—about my highest reverence—remember?"

"Yes . . ."

"Kira, will you marry me?"

Her hands fell limply. She looked at him, silently, her eyes wide and pleading.

"Kira, dearest, don't you see what we're doing? Why do we have to hide and lie? Why do I have to live in this agony of counting hours, days, weeks between our meetings. Why have I no right to call you in those hours when I think I'll go insane if I don't see you? Why do I have to keep silent? Why can't I tell them all, tell men like Leo Kovalensky, that you're mine, that you're my . . . my wife?"

4
WE THE LIVING

She did not look frightened any longer; the name he had pronounced had given her courage, her greatest, coldest battlefield courage. She said: "Andrei, I can't."

"Why?"

"Would you do something for me, if I asked you very urgently?"

"Anything."

"Don't ask me why."

"All right."

"And I can't go abroad. But if you want to go alone . . ."

"Let's forget it, Kira. I won't ask any questions. But as for my going alone—don't you think you shouldn't say that?"

She laughed, jumping up: "Yes, let's forget it. Let's have our own bit of Europe right here. I'm going to try your gift on. Turn around and don't look."

He obeyed. When he turned again, she was standing at the fireplace, her arms crossed behind her head, fire flickering behind the black silhouette of her body, through a thin, black mist.

He was bending her backward, so that the locks of her hair, tumbling down, looked red in the glow of the fire; he was whispering: "Kira . . . I wasn't complaining tonight . . . I'm happy . . . happy that I have nothing left but you. . . ."

She moaned: "Andrei, don't say it! Please, please, don't say it!"

He did not say it again. But his eyes, his arms, the body he felt against her body, cried to her without sound: "I have nothing left but you . . . nothing . . . but you. . . ."

*

She came home long after midnight. Her room was dark and empty. She sat wearily down on the bed, to wait for Leo. She fell asleep, exhausted, her hair spilled over the foot of the bed, her body huddled in her crumpled red dress.

The telephone awakened her; it was ringing fiercely, insistently. She jumped up. It was daylight. The lamp was burning on the table; she was alone.

She staggered to the telephone, her eyes closing heavily, her eyelids leaden. "Allo?" she muttered, leaning against the wall, her eyes closed.

"Is that you, Kira Alexandrovna?" an unctuous masculine voice asked, drawling vowels meticulously, with an artificial note in the pleasant inflection.

"Yes," said Kira. "Who . . ."

"It's Karp Morozov speaking, Kira Alexandrovna. Kira Alexandrovna, soul of mine, can you come over and take that . . . that Lev Sergeievitch home? Really, he shouldn't be seen at my house so often. It seems there was a party and . . ."

"I'll be right over," said Kira, her eyes open wide, dropping the receiver.

She dressed hurriedly. She could not fasten her coat; her fingers would not slip the buttons through the buttonholes: her fingers were trembling.

It was Morozov who opened the door when she arrived. He was in his shirtsleeves, and a vest was fastened too tightly, pulled in taut little wrinkles, across his broad stomach. He bowed low, like a peasant: "Ah, Kira Alexandrovna, soul of mine, how are we today? Sorry I had to trouble you, but . . . Come right in, come right in."

The wide, white-paneled lobby smelled of lilac and moth balls. Behind a half-open door, she heard Leo laughing, a gay, ringing, carefree laughter.

She walked straight into the dining room, without waiting for Morozov's invitation. In the dining room, a table was set for three. Antonina Pavlovna held a teacup, her little finger crooked delicately over its handle; she wore an Oriental kimono; powder was caked in white patches on her nose; lipstick was smeared in a blot between her nose and chin; her eyes seemed very small without make-up, puffed and weary. Leo sat at the table in his black trousers and dress shirt, his collar thrown open, his tie loose, his hair disheveled. He was laughing sonorously, trying to balance an egg on the edge of a knife.

He raised his head and looked at Kira, astonished. His face was fresh, young, radiant as on an early spring morning, a face that nothing, it seemed, could mar or alter. "Kira! What are you doing here?"

"Kira Alexandrovna just happened to . . ." Morozov began timidly, but Kira interrupted bluntly:

"He called me."

"Why, you . . ." Leo whirled on Morozov, his face turned into a vicious snarl; then he shook his head and laughed again, as swiftly and suddenly: "Oh, hell, that's a good one! So they all think that I have a wet-nurse to watch me!"

"Lev Sergeievitch, soul of mine, I didn't mean to . . ."

"Shut up!" Leo ordered and turned to Kira. "Well, since you're here, take your coat off and sit down and have some breakfast. Tonia, see if you have another couple of . . ."

WE THE LIVING

"We're going home, Leo," Kira said quietly. He looked at her and shrugged: "If you insist . . ." and rose slowly.

Morozov picked up his unfinished cup of tea; he poured it into his saucer and held the saucer on the tips of his fingers and drank, sucking loudly. He said, looking at Kira, then at Leo, hesitantly, over the edge of the saucer: "I . . . you see . . . it was like this: I called Kira Alexandrovna because I was afraid that you . . . you weren't well, Lev Sergeicvitch, and you . . ."

"... were drunk," Leo finished for him. "Oh, no, but . . ."

"I was. Yesterday. But not this morning. You had no business . . ."

"It was just a little party, Kira Alexandrovna," Antonina Pavlovna interrupted soothingly. "I suppose we did stay a little too late, and . . ."

"It was five o'clock when you crawled into bed," Morozov growled. "I know, because you bumped into my bed and upset the water pitcher."

"Well, Leo brought me home," Antonina Pavlovna continued, ignoring him, "and I presume he must have been a little tired. . . ."

"A little . . ." Morozov began.

"... drunk," Leo finished for him, shrugging.

"Plenty drunk, if you ask me." Morozov's freckles disappeared in a red flush of anger. "Just so drunk that I get up this morning and find him sprawled on the davenport in the lobby, full dress and all, and you couldn't have awakened him with an earthquake."

"Well," Leo asked indifferently, "what of it?"

"It was a grand party," said Antonina Pavlovna. "And here Leo can spend money! It was thrilling to watch. Really, darling, you were too reckless, though."

"What did I do? I don't remember."
"Well, I didn't mind it when you lost so much on roulette, and it was cute when you paid them ten rubles every cheap glass you broke, but really you didn't have to let the waiters hundred-ruble tips."

"Why not? Let them see the difference between a gentleman and the Red trash of today."

"Yes, but you didn't have to pay the orchestra fifty to shut up every time they played something you didn't like. And then, when you chose the prettiest girl in the

whom you'd never seen before, and you offered her any price she named to undress before the guests, and you stuck those hundreds down her décolleté . . ."

"Well," Leo shrugged, "she had a beautiful body."

"Let's go, Leo," said Kira.

"Wait a minute, Lev Sergeievitch," Morozov said slowly, putting his saucer down. "Just where did you get all that money?"

"I don't know," said Leo. "Tonia gave it to me."

"Antonina, where did you . . ."

"Oh?" Antonina Pavlovna raised her eyebrows and looked bored. "I took that package you had under the waste basket."

"Tonia!" Morozov roared, jumping up, so that the dishes rattled on the table. "You didn't take that!"

"Certainly I took it," Antonina Pavlovna tilted her chin defiantly. "And I'm not accustomed to being reproached about money. I took it and that's that, so what are you going to do about it?"

"My God! Oh, my God! Oh, my Lord in Heaven!" Morozov grasped his head and nodded, rocking like a toy with a broken spring. "What are we going to do? That was the money we owe Syerov. It was due yesterday. And we haven't got another ruble on hand . . . and Syerov . . . well, if I don't deliver it today, he'll kill me. . . . What am I going to do? . . . He won't be kept waiting and . . ."

"Oh, he won't, eh?" Leo chuckled coldly. "Well, he'll wait and he'll like it. Stop whining like a mutt. What are you afraid of? He can do nothing to us and he knows it."

"I'm surprised at you, Lev Sergeievitch," Morozov growled, his freckles drowned in red. "You get your fair share, don't you? Do you think it was honorable to take . . ."

"Honorable?" Leo laughed resonantly, his gaicest, lightest, most-insulting laughter. "Are you speaking to me? My dear friend, I've acquired the great privilege of not having to worry about that word at all. Not at all. In fact, if you find something particularly dishonorable—you may be sure I'll do it. The lower—the better. I wish you a good day. . . . Come on, Kira." He looked around uncertainly: "Where the hell's my hat?"

When they were alone in their room, Leo said brusquely: I won't have any criticism from you or anybody else. And you, particularly, have no complaints to make. I haven't slept with any other woman, if that's what you're worried about, and that's all you have to know."

"I wasn't worried, Leo. I have no complaints to make and no criticism. But I want to speak to you. Will you listen?"

He said: "Sure," indifferently, and sat down.

She knelt before him and slipped her arms around him and shook her hair back, her eyes wide, intent, her voice tense with the calm of a last effort: "Leo, I can't reproach you. I can't blame you. I know what you're doing. I know why you're doing it. But listen: it's not too late; they haven't caught you; you still have time. Let's make an effort, a last one: let's save all we can and apply for a foreign passport. Let's run to the point of the earth that's the farthest from this damned country."

He looked into her flaming eyes with eyes that were like mirrors which could not reflect a flame any longer. "Why bother?" he asked.

"Leo, I know what you'll say. You have no desire to live. You don't care any more. But listen: do it without desire. Even if you don't believe you'll ever care again. Just postpone your final judgment on yourself; postpone it till you get there. When you're free in a human country again—then see if you still want to live."

"You little fool! Do you think they give foreign passports to men with my record?"

"Leo, we have to try. We can't give up. We can't go on for one minute without that hope ahead of us. Leo, it can't get you! I won't let it get you!"

"Who? The G.P.U.? How are you going to stop it?"

"No! Not the G.P.U. Forget the G.P.U. There's something worse, much worse. It got Victor. It got Andrei. It got mother! It won't get you."

"What do you mean, it got Victor? Are you comparing it to that bootlicking rat, that . . ."

"Leo, the bootlicking and all those things—that's nothing. There's something much worse that it's done to Victor, underneath, deeper, more final—and the bootlicking, it's only consequence. It does that. It kills something. Have you ever seen plants grown without sunlight, without air? I won't let it do that to you. Let it take a hundred and fifty million living creatures. But not you, Leo! Not you, my highest reverence . . ."

"What an exaggerated expression! Where did you get that?"

She stared at him, repeating: "Where did I . . ."

"Really, Kira, sometimes I wonder why you've never outgrown that tendency to be so serious about everything. Nothing is getting me. Nothing is doing anything to me. I'm doing what I please, which is more than you can say about anyone else these days."

"Leo, listen! There's something I want to do—to try. We have a lot of things to untangle, you and I both. And it's not easy. Let's try to slash it all off, at once."

"By doing what?"

"Leo, let's get married."

"Huh?" He stared at her incredulously.

She repeated: "Let's get married."

He threw his head back and laughed. He laughed resonantly, a clear, light, icy laughter, as he had laughed at Andrei Taganov, as he had laughed at Morozov. "What's this, Kira? The make-an-honest-woman-of-you nonsense?"

"No, it's not that."

"Rather late for the two of us, isn't it?"

"Why not, Leo?"

"What for? Do we need it?"

"No."

"Then why do it?"

"I don't know. But I'm asking it."

"That's not reason enough to do something senseless. I'm not in a mood to become a respectable husband. If you're afraid of losing me—no scrap of paper, scribbled by a Red clerk, is going to hold me."

"I'm not afraid of losing you. I'm afraid that you will lose yourself."

"But a couple of rubles at the Zags and the Upravdom's blessing will save my soul, is that it?"

"Leo, I have no reasons to offer. But I'm asking it."

"Are you delivering an ultimatum?"

She said softly, with a quiet smile of surrender and resignation: "No."

"Then we'll forget about it."

"Yes, Leo."

He slipped his hands under her armpits and pulled her up into his arms, and said wearily: "You crazy, hysterical child! You drive yourself into a fit over some weird fear—Now forget about it. We'll save every ruble from now on—what you want. You can put it away for a trip to A . . ."

San Francisco or the planet Jupiter. And we won't talk about it again. All right?"

He was smiling, his arrogant smile on a face that remained incredibly beautiful, a face that was like a drug to her, inexplicable, unconditional, consummate like music. She buried her head on his shoulder, repeating helplessly, hopelessly, a name as a drug: "Leo . . . Leo . . . Leo . . ."

X

Pavel Syerov had a drink before he came to his office. He had another drink in the afternoon. He had telephoned Morozov and a voice he knew to be Morozov's had told him that the Citizen Morozov was not at home. He paced up and down his office and smashed an inkstand. He found a misspelled word in a letter he had dictated, and threw the letter, crumpled into a twisted ball, at his secretary's face. He telephoned Morozov and got no answer. A woman telephoned him and her soft, lisping voice said sweetly, insistently: "But, Pavlusha darling, you promised me that bracelet!" A speculator brought a bracelet tied in the corner of a dirty handkerchief, and refused to leave it without the full amount in cash. Syerov telephoned Morozov at the Food Trust; a secretary demanded to know who was calling; Syerov slammed the receiver down without answering. He roared at a ragged applicant for a job that he would turn him over to the G.P.U. and ordered his secretary to throw out all those waiting to see him. He left the office an hour earlier than usual and slammed the door behind him.

He walked past Morozov's house on his way home and hesitated, but saw a militia-man on the corner and did not enter.

At dinner—which had been sent from a communal kitchen two blocks away, and was cold, with grease floating over the cabbage soup—Comrade Sonia said: "Really, Pavel, I've got to have a fur coat. I can't allow myself to catch a cold—you know—for the child's sake. And no rabbit fur, either. I know you can afford it. Oh, I'm not saying anything about anyone's little activities, but I'm just keeping my eyes open."

He threw his napkin into the soup and left the table without eating.

He called Morozov's house and let the telephone ring for five minutes. There was no answer. He sat on the bed and emptied a bottle of vodka. Comrade Sonia left for a meeting of the Teachers' Council of an Evening School for Illiterate Women House Workers. He emptied a second bottle.

Then he rose resolutely, swaying a little, pulled his belt tight across his fur jacket and went to Morozov's house.

He rang three times. There was no answer. He kept his finger on the bell button, leaning indifferently against the wall. He heard no sound behind the door, but he heard steps rising up the stairs and he flung himself into the darkest corner of the landing. The steps died on the floor below and he heard a door opening and closing. He could not let himself be seen waiting there, he remembered dimly. He reached for his notebook and wrote, pressing the notebook to the wall, in the light of a street lamp outside:

MOROZOV, YOU GOD-DAMN BASTARD!

If you don't come across with what's due me before tomorrow morning, you'll eat breakfast at the G.P.U., and you know what that means.

Affectionately,

PAVEL SYEROV.

He folded the note and slipped it under the door.

Fifteen minutes later, Morozov stepped noiselessly out of his bathroom and tiptoed to the lobby. He listened nervously, but heard no sound on the stair-landing. Then he noticed the faint blur of white in the darkness, on the floor.

He picked up the note and read it, bending under the dining-room lamp. His face looked gray.

The telephone rang. He shuddered, frozen to the spot, as if the eyes somewhere behind that ringing bell could see ~~him~~ with the note in his hand. He crammed the note deep ~~into~~ his pocket and answered the telephone, trembling.

It was an old aunt of his and she sniffled into ~~the receiver~~ asking to borrow some money. He called her ~~and~~ and hung up.

Through the open bedroom door, A ~~ting~~ at her dressing table, brushing her piercing voice, objecting to the use

whirled upon her ferociously: "If it weren't for you and that damn lover of yours . . ."

Antonina Pavlovna shrieked: "He's not my lover—yet! If he were, do you think I'd be squatting around a sloppy old fool like you?"

They had a quarrel.

Morozov forgot about the note in his pocket.

*

The European roof garden had a ceiling of glass panes; it looked like a black void staring down, crushing those below more implacably than a steel vault. There were lights; yellow lights that looked dimmed in an oppressive haze which was cigarette smoke, or heat, or the black abyss above. There were white tables and yellow glints in the silverware.

Men sat at the tables. Yellow sparks flashed in their diamond studs and in the beads of moisture on their red, flushed faces. They ate; they bent eagerly over their plates; they chewed hurriedly, incredulously; they were not out on a care-free evening in a gay night spot; they were *eating*.

In a corner, a yellowish bald head bent over a red steak on a white plate; the man cut the steak, smacking his fleshy red lips. Across the table, a red-headed girl of fifteen ate hastily, her head drawn into her shoulders; when she raised her head, she blushed from the tip of her short, freckled nose to her white, freckled neck, and her mouth was twisted as if she were going to scream.

A fierce jet of smoke swayed by a dark window pane; a thin individual, with a long face that betrayed too closely its future appearance as a skull, rocked monotonously on the back legs of his chair, and smoked without interruption, holding a cigarette in long, yellow fingers, spouting smoke out of wide nostrils frozen in a sardonic, unhealthy grin.

Women moved among the tables, with an awkward, embarrassed insolence. A head of soft, golden waves nodded unsteadily under a light, wide eyes in deep blue rings, a young mouth open in a vicious, sneering smile. In the middle of the room, a gaunt, dark woman with knobs on her shoulders, holes under her collar-bones and a skin the color of muddy coffee, was laughing too loudly, opening painted lips like a gash over strong white teeth and very red gums.

The orchestra played "John Gray." It flung brief, blunt notes out into space, as if tearing them off the strings before they

were ripe, hiding the gap of an uncapturable gaiety under a convulsive rhythm.

Waiters glided soundlessly through the crowd and bent over the tables, obsequious and exaggerated, and their flabby jowls conveyed expressions of respect, and mockery, and pity for those guilty, awkward ones who made such an effort to be gay.

Morozov did remember that he had to raise money before morning. He came to the European roof garden, alone. He sat at three different tables, smoked four different cigars and whispered confidentially into five different ears that belonged to corpulent men who did not seem to be in a hurry. At the end of two hours, he had the money in his wallet.

He mopped his forehead with relief, sat alone at a table in a dark corner and ordered cognac.

Stepan Timoshenko leaned so far across a white table cloth that he seemed to be lying on, rather than sitting at, the table. His head was propped on his elbow, his fingers on the nape of his broad neck; he had a glass in his other hand. When the glass was empty, he held it uncertainly in the air, wondering how to refill it with one hand; he solved the problem by dropping the glass with a sonorous crash and lifting the bottle to his lips. The maitre d'hotel looked at him nervously, sidewise, frowning; he frowned at the jacket with the rabbit fur collar, at the crumpled sailor cap sliding over one ear, at the muddy shoes flung out onto the satin train of a woman at the next table. But the maitre d'hotel had to be cautious; Stephan Timoshenko had been there before; everyone knew that he was a Party member.

A waiter slid unobtrusively up to his table and gathered the broken glass into a dust-pan. Another waiter brought a sparkling clean glass and slipped his fingers gently over Timoshenko's bottle, whispering: "May I help you, citizen?"

"Go to hell!" said Timoshenko and pushed the glass across the table with the back of his hand. The glass vacillated on the edge and crashed down. "I'll do as I please!" Timoshenko roared, and heads turned to look at him. "I'll drink out of a bottle if I please. I'll drink out of two bottles!"

"But, citizen . . ."

"Want me to show you how?" Timoshenko asked, his eyes gleaming ominously.

"No, indeed, citizen," the waiter said hastily.

"Go to hell," said Timoshenko with soft persuasion. "I don't like your snoot. I don't like any of the snoots around

here." He rose, swaying, roaring: "I don't like any of the damn snoots around here!"

He staggered among the tables. The maitre d'hotel whispered gently at his elbow: "If you're not feeling well, citizen . . ."

"Out of my way!" bellowed Timoshenko, tripping over a woman's slippers.

He had almost reached the door, when he stopped suddenly and his face melted into a wide, gentle smile. "Ah," he said. "A friend of mine. A dear friend of mine!"

He staggered to Morozov, swung a chair high over someone's head, planted it with a resounding smash at Morozov's table and sat down.

"I beg your pardon, citizen?" Morozov gasped, rising.

"Sit still, pal," said Timoshenko and his huge tanned paw pressed Morozov's shoulder down, like a sledge hammer, so that Morozov fell back on his chair with a thud. "Can't run away from a friend, Comrade Morozov. We're friends, you know. Old friends. Well, maybe you don't know me. Stepan Timoshenko's the name. Stepan Timoshenko. . . . Of the Red Baltfleet," he added as an after-thought.

"Oh," said Morozov. "Oh."

"Yep," said Timoshenko, "an old friend and admirer of yours. And you know what?"

"No," said Morozov.

"We gotta have a drink together. Like good pals. We gotta have a drink. Waiter!" he roared so loudly that a violinist missed a note of "John Gray."

"Bring us two bottles!" Timoshenko ordered when a waiter bowed hesitantly over his shoulder. "No! Bring us three bottles!"

"Three bottles of what, citizen?" the waiter asked timidly.

"Of anything," said Timoshenko. "No! Wait! What's the most expensive? What is it that the good, fat capitalists guzzle in proper style?"

"Champagne, citizen?"

"Make it champagne and damn quick! Three bottles and two glasses!"

When the waiter brought the champagne, Timoshenko poured it and planted a glass before Morozov. "There!" said Timoshenko with a friendly smile. "Going to drink with me, pal?"

"Yes, co . . . comrade," said Morozov meekly. "Thank you, comrade."

"Your health, Comrade Morozov!" said Timoshenko, solemnly, raising his glass. "To Comrade Morozov, citizen of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics!"

They clinked their glasses. Morozov glanced around furtively, helplessly, but no help was coming. He drank, the glass trembling at his lips. Then he smiled ingratiatingly: "This was very nice of you, comrade," he muttered, rising. "And I appreciate it very much, comrade. Now if you don't mind. I've got to be going and . . ."

"Sit still," ordered Timoshenko. He refilled his glass and raised it, leaning back, smiling, but his smile did not seem friendly any longer and his dark eyes were looking at Morozov steadily, sardonically. "To the great Citizen Morozov, the man who beat the revolution!" he said and laughed resonantly, and emptied the glass in one gulp, his head thrown back.

"Comrade . . ." Morozov muttered through lips he could barely force open, "comrade . . . what do you mean?"

Timoshenko laughed louder and leaned across the table toward Morozov, his elbows crossed, his cap far back on his head, over sticky ringlets of dark hair. The laughter stopped abruptly, as if slashed off. Timoshenko said softly, persuasively, with a smile that frightened Morozov more than the laughter: "Don't look so scared, Comrade Morozov. You don't have to be afraid of me. I'm nothing but a beaten wretch, beaten by you, Comrade Morozov, and all I want is to tell you humbly that I know I'm beaten and I hold no grudge. Hell, I hold a profound admiration for you, Comrade Morozov. You've taken the greatest revolution the world has ever seen and patched the seat of your pants with it!"

"Comrade," said Morozov with a blue-lipped determination, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes," said Timoshenko ruefully. "Oh, yes, you do. You know more about it than I do, more than millions of young fools do, that watch us from all over the world with worshipping eyes. You must tell them, Comrade Morozov. You ~~have~~ a lot to tell them."

"Honestly, comrade, I . . ."

"For instance, you know how you made us do it. ~~I know~~ All I know is that we've done it. We made a revolution. We had red banners. The banners said that we made it for the world proletariat. We had fools who thought in their ~~beaten~~ hearts that we made it for all those downtrodden ~~and~~ who suffer on this earth. But you and I ~~have~~ have a secret. We know, but we v

world doesn't want to hear it. We know that the revolution—it was made for you, Comrade Morozov, and hats off to you!"

"Comrade whoever you are, comrade," Morozov moaned, "what do you want?"

"Just to tell you it's yours, Comrade Morozov."

"What?" Morozov asked, wondering if he was going insane.

"The revolution," said Timoshenko pleasantly. "The revolution. Do you know what a revolution is? I'll tell you. We killed. We killed men in the streets, and in the cellars, and aboard our ships. . . . Aboard our ships. . . . I remember. . . . There was one boy—an officer—he couldn't have been more than twenty. He made the sign of the cross—his mother must've taught him that. He had blood running out of his mouth. He looked at me. His eyes—they weren't frightened any more. They were kind of astonished. About something his mother hadn't taught him. He looked at me. That was the last thing. He looked at me."

Drops were rolling down Timoshenko's jowls. He filled a glass and it tottered uncertainly in his hand, trying to find his mouth, and he drank without knowing that he was drinking, his eyes fixed on Morozov's.

"That's what we did in the year nineteen-hundred-and-seventeen. Now I'll tell you what we did it for. We did it so that the Citizen Morozov could get up in the morning and scratch his belly, because the mattress wasn't soft enough and it made his navel itch. We did it so that he could ride in a big limousine with a down pillow on the seat and a little glass tube for flowers by the window, lilies-of-the-valley, you know. So that he could drink cognac in a place like this. So that he could scramble up, on holidays, to a stand all draped in red bunting and make a speech about the proletariat. We did it, Comrade Morozov, and we take a bow. Don't glare at me like that, Comrade Morozov, I'm only your humble servant, I've done my best for you, and you should reward me with a smile, really, you have a lot to thank me for!"

"Comrade!" Morozov panted. "Let me go!"

"Sit still!" Timoshenko roared. "Pour yourself a glass and drink. Do you hear me? Drink, you bastard! Drink and listen!"

Morozov obeyed; his glass tinkled, shaking, against the bottle.

"You see," said Timoshenko, as if each word were tearing his throat on its way out, "I don't mind that we're beaten. I don't mind that we've taken the greatest of crimes on our

shoulders and then let it slip through our fingers. I wouldn't mind it if we had been beaten by a tall warrior in a steel helmet, a human dragon spitting fire. But we're beaten by a louse. A big, fat, slow, blond louse. Ever seen lice? The blond ones are the fattest. . . . It was our own fault. Once, men were ruled with a god's thunder. Then they were ruled with a sword. Now they're ruled with a Primus. Once, they were held by reverence. Then they were held by fear. Now they're held by their stomachs. Men have worn chains on their necks, and on their wrists, and on their ankles. Now they're enchained by their rectums. Only you don't hold heroes by their rectums. It was our own fault."

"Comrade, for God's sake, comrade, why tell it all to me?"

"We started building a temple. Do we end with a chapel? No! And we don't even end with an outhouse. We end with a musty kitchen with a second-hand stove! We set fire under a kettle and we brewed and stirred and mixed blood and fire and steel. What are we fishing now out of the brew? A new humanity? Men of granite? Or at least a good and horrible monster? No! Little puny things that wiggle. Little things that can bend both ways, little double-jointed spirits. Little things that don't even bow humbly to be whipped. No! They take the lash obediently and whip themselves! Ever sat at a social-activity club meeting? Should. Do you good. Learn a lot about the human spirit."

"Comrade!" Morozov breathed. "What do you want? Is it money you want? I'll pay. I'll . . ."

Timoshenko laughed so loudly that heads turned and Morozov cringed, trying not to be noticed. "You louse!" Timoshenko roared, laughing. "You fool, near-sighted, demented louse! Who do you think you're talking to? Comrade Victor Dunaev? Comrade Pavel Syerov? Comrade . . ."

"Comrade!" Morozov roared, so that heads turned to him, but he did not care any longer. "You . . . you . . . you have no right to say that! I have nothing whatever to do with Comrade Syerov! I . . ."

"Say," Timoshenko remarked slowly, "I didn't say you had. Why the excitement?"

"Well, I thought . . . I . . . you . . ."

"I didn't say you had," Timoshenko repeated. "I only said you should have. You and he and Victor Dunaev. And about one million others—with Party cards and stamps affixed. The winners and the conquerors. Those who crawl. That, pal, is the great slogan of the men of the future: those who crawl."

Listen, do you know how many millions of eyes are watching us across lands and oceans? They're not very close and they can't see very well. They see a big shadow rising. They think it's a huge beast. They're too far to see that it's soft and brownish and fuzzy. You know, fuzzy, a glistening sort of fuzz. They don't know that it's made of cockroaches. Little glossy, brown cockroaches, packed tight, one on the other, into a huge wall. Little cockroaches that keep silent and wiggle their whiskers. But the world is too far to see the whiskers. That's what's wrong with the world, Comrade Morozov: they don't see the whiskers!"

"Comrade! Comrade, what are you talking about?"

"They see a black cloud and they hear thunder. They've been told that behind the cloud, blood is running freely, and men fight, and men kill, and men die. Well, what of it? They, those who watch, are not afraid of blood. There's an honor in blood. But do they know that it's not blood we're bathed in, it's pus? Listen, I'll give you advice: If you want to keep this land in your tentacles, tell the world that you're chopping heads off for breakfast and shooting men by the regiment. Let the world think that you're a huge monster to be feared and respected and fought honorably. But don't let them know that your army is not an army of heroes, nor even of fiends, but of shriveled bookkeepers with a rupture who've learned to be arrogant. Don't let them know that you're not to be shot, but to be disinfected. Don't let them know that you're not to be fought with cannons, but with carbolic acid!"

Morozov's napkin was crumpled into a drenched ball in his fist. He wiped his forehead once more. He said, trying to make his voice gentle and soothing, trying to rise imperceptibly. "You're right, comrade. Those are very fine sentiments. I agree with you absolutely. Now if you'll allow . . ."

"Sit down!" roared Timoshenko. "Sit down and drink a toast. Drink it or I'll shoot you like a mongrel. I still carry a gun, you know. Here . . ." he poured and a pale golden trickle ran down the table cloth to the floor. "Drink to the men who took a red banner and wiped their ass with it!"

Morozov drank.

Then he put his hand in his pocket and took out a handkerchief to mop his forehead. A crumpled piece of paper fell to the floor.

It was the swift, ferocious jerk, with which Morozov plunged down for it, that made Timoshenko's fist dart out

and seize Morozov's hand. "What's that, pal?" asked Timoshenko.

Morozov's foot kicked the paper out of reach and it rolled under an empty table. Morozov said indifferently, little damp beads sparkling under his wide nostrils: "Oh, that? Nothing, comrade. Nothing at all. Just some scrap of waste paper."

"Oh," said Timoshenko, watching him with eyes that were alarmingly sober. "Oh, just a scrap of waste paper. Well, we'll let it lie there. We'll let the janitor throw it in the waste basket."

"Yes," Morozov nodded eagerly, "that's it. In the waste basket. Very well put, comrade." He giggled, mopping his forehead. "We'll let the janitor throw it in the waste basket. Would you like another drink, comrade? The bottle's empty. The next one's on me. Waiter! Another bottle of the same."

"Sure," said Timoshenko without moving. "I'll have another drink."

The waiter brought the bottle. Morozov filled the glasses, leaning solicitously over the table. He said, regaining his voice syllable by syllable: "You know, comrade, I think you misunderstood me, but I don't blame you. I can see your motives and I sympathize thoroughly. There are so many objectionable—er—shall we say dishonorable?—types these days. One has to be careful. We must get better acquainted, comrade. It's hard to tell at a glance, you know, and particularly in a place like this. I bet you thought I was a—a speculator, or something. Didn't you? Very funny, isn't it?"

"Very," said Timoshenko. "What are you looking down at, Comrade Morozov?"

"Oh!" Morozov giggled, jerking his head up. "I was just looking at my shoes, comrade. They're sort of tight, you know. Uncomfortable. Guess it's because I'm on my feet so much, you know, in the office."

"Uh-huh," said Timoshenko. "Shouldn't neglect your feet. Should take a hot bath when you come home, a pan of hot water with a little vinegar. That's good for sore feet."

"Oh, indeed? I'm glad you told me. Yes, indeed, thank you very much. I'll be sure and try it. First thing when I get home."

"About time you were getting home, isn't it, Comrade Morozov?"

"Oh! . . . well, I guess . . . well, it's not so late yet and . . ."

"I thought you were in a hurry a little while ago."

"I . . . well, no, I can't say that I'm in any particular hurry, and besides, such a pleasant . . ."

"What the matter, Comrade Morozov? Anything you don't want to leave around here?"

"Who, me? I don't know what that could be, comrade . . . comrade . . . what did you say your name was, comrade?"

"Timoshenko. Stepan Timoshenko. It isn't that little scrap of waste paper down there under the table, by any chance?"

"Oh, that? Why, Comrade Timoshenko, I'd forgotten all about that. What would I want with it?"

"I don't know," said Timoshenko slowly.

"That's just it, Comrade Timoshenko, nothing. Nothing at all. Another drink, Comrade Timoshenko?"

"Thanks."

"Here you are, comrade."

"Anything wrong under the table, Comrade Morozov?"

"Why no, Comrade Timoshenko. I was just bending to tie my shoe lace. The shoe lace is unfastened."

"Where?"

"Well, isn't that funny? It really isn't unfastened at all. See? And I thought it was. You know how it is, these Soviet . . . these shoe laces nowadays. Not solid at all. Not dependable."

"No," said Timoshenko, "they tear like twine."

"Yes," said Morozov, "just like twine. Just, as you would say, like—like twine. . . . What are you leaning over for, Comrade Timoshenko? You're not comfortable. Why don't you move over here like this, you'll be more . . ."

"No," said Timoshenko, "I'm just fine here where I am. With a fine view of the table there. I like that table. Nice legs it has. Hasn't it? Sort of artistic, you know."

"Quite right, comrade, very artistic. Now on the other hand, comrade, there, on our left, isn't that a pretty blonde there, by the orchestra? Quite a figure, eh?"

"Yes, indeed, comrade. . . . It's nice shoes you have, Comrade Morozov. Patent leather, too. Bet you didn't get those in a co-operative."

"No . . . that is . . . to tell you the truth . . . well, you see . . ."

"What I like about them is that bulb. Right there, on the toes. Like a bump on someone's forehead. And shiny, too. Yep, those foreigners sure know how to make shoes."

"Speaking of the efficiency of production, comrade, take for instance, in the capitalistic countries . . . in the . . . in the . . ."

"Yes, Comrade Morozov, in the capitalistic countries?"

It was Morozov who leaped for the letter. It was Timo-

shenko who caught his wrist with fingers like talons, and for one brief moment they were on their hands and knees on the floor, and their eyes met silently like those of two beasts in deadly battle. Then Timoshenko's other hand seized the letter, and he rose slowly, releasing Morozov, and sat down at the table. He was reading the letter, while Morozov was still on his hands and knees, staring up at him with the eyes of a man awaiting the verdict of a court-martial.

MOROZOV, YOU GOD-DAMN BASTARD!

If you don't come across with what's due me before tomorrow morning, you'll eat breakfast at the G.P.U., and you know what that means,

Affectionately,

PAVEL SYEROV.

Morozov was sitting at the table when Timoshenko raised his head from the letter. Timoshenko laughed as Morozov had never heard a man laugh.

Timoshenko rose slowly, laughing. His stomach shook, and his rabbit fur collar, and the sinews of his bare throat. He swayed a little and he held the letter in both hands. Then his laughter died down slowly, smoothly, like a gramophone record unwinding, to a low, coughing chuckle on a single dry note. He slipped the letter into his pocket and turned slowly, his shoulders stooped, his movements suddenly awkward, humble. He shuffled heavily, uncertainly to the door. At the door, the maitre d'hotel glanced at him sidewise. Timoshenko returned the glance; Timoshenko's glance was gentle.

Morozov sat at the table, one hand frozen in mid-air in an absurd, twisted position, like the hand of a paralytic. He heard Timoshenko's chuckles dropping down the stairway; monotonous, disjointed chuckles that sounded like hiccoughs, like barks, like sobs.

He jumped up suddenly. "Oh my God!" he moaned. "Oh, my God!"

He ran, forgetting his hat and coat, down the long stairs, out into the snow. The broad white silent street. Timoshenko was nowhere.

drank vodka. Whenever he heard the telephone or the door bell ringing, he crouched, his head in his shoulders, and bit his knuckles. Nothing happened.

At dinner time, Antonina Pavlovna brought the evening paper and threw it to him, snapping: "What the hell's the matter with you today?"

He glanced through the paper. There were news items on the front page:

In the village Vasilkino, in the Kama region, the peasants, goaded by the counter-revolutionary hoarder element, burned the local Club of Karl Marx. The bodies of the Club president and secretary, Party comrades from Moscow, were found in the charred ruins. A G.P.U. squad is on its way to Vasilkino.

In the village Sverskoe, twenty-five peasants were executed last night for the murder of the Village Correspondent, a young comrade from the staff of a Communist Union of Youth newspaper in Samara. The peasants refused to divulge the name of the murderer.

On the last page was a short item:

The body of Stepan Timoshenko, former sailor of the Baltic Fleet, was found early this morning under a bridge, on the ice of Obukhovsky Canal. He had shot himself through the mouth. No papers, save his Party card, were found on the body to explain the reason for his suicide.

Morozov wiped his forehead, as if a noose had been slipped off his throat, and drank two glasses of vodka.

When the telephone rang, he swaggered boldly to take the receiver, and Antonina Pavlovna wondered why he was chuckling.

"Morozov?" a muffled voice whispered over the wire.

"That you, Pavlusha?" Morozov asked. "Listen, pal, I'm awfully sorry, but I have the money and . . ."

"Forget the money," Syerov hissed. "It's all right. Listen . . . did I leave you a note yesterday?"

"Why, yes, but I guess I deserved it and . . ."

"Have you destroyed it?"

"Why?"

"Nothing. Only you understand what it could . . . Have you destroyed it?"

Morozov looked at the evening paper, grinned and said: "Sure. I have. Forget about it, pal."

He held the paper in his hand all evening long.

"The fool!" he muttered under his breath, so that Antonina Pavlovna looked at him inquisitively, chin forward. "The damn fool! He lost it. Wandered about all night, God knows where, the drunken fool. He lost it!"

Morozov did not know that Stepan Timoshenko had come home from the European roof garden and sat at a rickety table in his unheated garret and written painstakingly a letter on a piece of brown wrapping paper, in the light of a dying candle in a green bottle; that he had folded the letter carefully and slipped it into an old envelope and slipped another scrap of paper, wrinkled and creased, into the envelope, and written Andrei Taganov's address on it; that he had sealed the letter and had gone, steadily, unhurriedly, down the creaking stairs into the street.

The letter on the brown wrapping paper said:

DEAR FRIEND ANDREI,

I promised to say goodbye and here it is. It's not quite what I promised, but I guess you'll forgive. I'm sick of seeing what I see and I can't stand to see it any longer. To you—as my only legacy—I'm leaving the letter you will find enclosed. It's a hard legacy, I know. I only hope that you won't follow me—too soon.

Your friend,

STEPAN TIMOSHENKO.

XI

Pavel Syerov sat at the desk in his office, correcting the typewritten copy of his next speech on "Railroads and the Class Struggle." His secretary stood by the desk, watching anxiously the pencil in his hand. The window of his office opened upon one of the terminal platforms. He raised his head just in time to notice a tall figure in a leather jacket disappearing down the platform. Syerov jerked forward, but the man was gone.

"Hey, did you see that man?" he snapped at the secretary.

"No, Comrade Sycrov. Where?"

"Never mind. It doesn't matter. I just thought it was someone I knew. Wonder what he's doing around here?"

An hour later, Pavel Syerov left his office, and—walking down the stairs, on his way to the street, chewing sunflower seeds and spitting out their shells—saw the man in the leather jacket again. He had not been mistaken: it was Andrei Taganov.

Pavel Syerov stopped, and his brows moved closer together, and he spit one more shell out of the corner of his mouth. Then he approached Andrei casually and said: "Good evening, Comrade Taganov."

Andrei answered: "Good evening, Comrade Syerov."

"Thinking of taking a trip, Andrei?"

"No."

"Hunting train speculators?"

"No."

"Been shifted to the G.P.U. transport section?"

"No."

"Well, I'm glad to see you. A rare person to see, aren't you? So busy you have no time for old friends any more. Have some sunflower seeds?"

"No, thank you."

"Don't have the dirty habit? Don't dissipate at all, do you? No vices, but one, eh? Well, I'm glad to see you taking an interest in this old station which is my home, so to speak. Been around for an hour or so, haven't you?"

"Any more questions to ask?"

"Who, me? I wasn't asking any questions. What would I be questioning you for? I was just being sociable, so to speak. One must be sociable once in a while, if one doesn't want to be branded as an individualist, you know. Why don't you drop in to see me while you're in these parts?"

"I may," said Andrei slowly. "Good-bye, Comrade Syerov."

Syerov stood, frowning, an unbroken sunflower seed between his teeth, and watched Andrei descending the stairs.

*

The clerk wiped his nose with his thumb and forefinger, wiped the linseed oil off the bottle's neck with his apron, and asked: "That all today, citizen?"

"That's all," said Andrei Taganov.

The clerk tore a piece of newspaper and wrapped the bottle, greasy stains spreading on the paper.

"Doing good business?" Andrei asked.

"Rotten," the clerk answered, shrugging his shoulders in an old blue sweater. "You're the first customer in three hours, I guess. Glad to hear a human voice. Nothing to do here but sit and scare mice off."

"That's too bad. Taking a loss, then?"

"Who, me? I don't own the joint."

"Then I guess you'll lose your job soon. The boss will be coming to do his own clerking."

"Who? My boss?" The clerk made a hoarse, cackling sound that was laughter, opening a wide hole with two broken, blackened teeth. "Not my boss, he won't. I'd like to see the elegant Citizen Kovalensky slinging herrings and linseed oil."

"Well, he won't be elegant long with such poor business."

"Maybe he won't," said the clerk, "and maybe he will."

"Maybe," said Andrei Taganov.

"Fifty kopeks, citizen."

"Here you are. Good night, citizen."

*

Antonina Pavlovna had tickets for the new ballet at the Marinsky Theater. It was a "profunion" show and Morozov had received the tickets at the Food Trust. But Morozov did not care for ballet and he had a school meeting to attend, where he was to make a speech on the "Proletarian Distribution of Food Products," so he gave the tickets to Antonina Pavlovna. She invited Leo and Kira to accompany her. "Well, of course, it's supposed to be a revolutionary ballet," she explained. "The first Red ballet. And, of course, you know my attitude on politics, but then, one should be broad-minded artistically, don't you think so? At least, it's an interesting experiment."

Kira refused the invitation. Leo left with Antonina Pavlovna. Antonina Pavlovna wore a jade green gown embroidered in gold, too tight across her stomach, and carried mother-of-pearl opera glasses on a long gold handle.

Kira had made a date with Andrei. But when she left the tramway and walked through the dark streets to the palace garden, she noticed her feet slowing down of their own will, her body tense, unyielding, fighting her, as if she were walking forward against a strong wind. It was as if her body remembered that which she was trying to forget: the night before, a night such as her first one in the gray and silver room she had shared with Leo for over three years. Her body felt

pure and hallowed; her feet were slowing down to retard her progress toward that which seemed a sacrilege because she did desire it and did not wish to desire it tonight.

When she reached the top of the long, dark stairs and Andrei opened the door, she asked: "Andrei, will you do something for me?"

"Before I kiss you?"

"No. But right after. Will you take me to a motion picture tonight?"

He kissed her, his face showing nothing but the ever-incredulous joy of seeing her again, then said: "All right."

They walked out together, arm in arm, fresh snow squeaking under their feet. The three largest film theaters on Nevsky displayed huge cotton signs with red letters:

THE HIT OF THE SEASON!
NEW MASTERPIECE OF THE SOVIET CINEMA!
"RED WARRIORS"

*A gigantic epic of the struggle of red heroes
in the civil war!*

A SAGA OF THE PROLETARIAT!
*A titanic drama of the heroic unknown masses
of Workers and Soldiers!*

One theater also bore the sign:

COMRADE LENIN SAID: "OF ALL THE ARTS, THE MOST
IMPORTANT ONE FOR RUSSIA IS THE CINEMA!"

The theater entrances blazed in streams of white light. The cashiers watched the passersby wistfully and yawned. No one stopped to look at the display of stills.

"You don't want to see that," said Andrei.

"No," said Kira.

The fourth and smaller theater played a foreign picture. It was an old, unknown picture with no stars, no actors' names announced; three faded stills were pasted in the show window, presenting a lady with too much make-up and a dress fashionable ten years ago.

"We might as well see that," said Kira.

The box office was closed.

"Sorry, citizens," said the usher, "no seats left. All sold out for this show and the next one. The foyer's jammed with people waiting."

"Well," said Kirà, as they turned away with resignation, "it may as well be 'The Red Warriors.'"

The foyer of the huge, white-columned "Parisiàna" was empty. The picture was on, and no one was allowed to enter in the middle of a show. But the usher bowed eagerly and let them enter.

The theater was dark, cold, and seemed silent under the roar of the orchestra, with the echoing silence of a huge, empty room. A few heads dotted the waste of grayish, empty rows.

On the screen, a mob of ragged gray uniforms ran through mud, waving bayonets. A mob of ragged gray uniforms sat around fires, cooking soup. A long train crawled slowly through endless minutes, open box cars loaded with a mob of ragged gray uniforms. "A MONTH LATER" said a title. A mob of ragged gray uniforms ran through mud, waving bayonets. A sea of arms waved banners. A mob of ragged gray uniforms crawled down trench tops, against a black sky. "THE BATTLE OF ZAVRASHINO" said a title. A mob in patent leather boots shot a mob in bast shoes lined again a wall. "THE BATTLE OF SAMSONOVO" said a title. A mob of ragged gray uniforms ran through mud, waving bayonets. "THREE WEEKS LATER" said a title. A long train crawled into a sunset. "THE PROLETARIAT STAMPED ITS MIGHTY BOOT DOWN THE TREACHEROUS THROAT OF DEPRAVED ARISTOCRATS" said a title. A mob in patent leather boots danced in a gaudy brothel, amid broken bottles and half-naked women who looked at the camera. "BUT THE SPIRIT OF OUR RED WARRIORS FLAMED WITH LOYALTY TO THE PROLETARIAN CAUSE" said a title. A mob of ragged gray uniforms ran through mud, waving bayonets. There was no plot, no hero. "THE AIM OF PROLETARIAN ART," a poster in the foyer had explained, "IS THE DRAMA AND COLOR OF MASS LIFE."

In the intermission before the second show, Andrei asked: "Do you want to see the beginning of that?"

"Yes," said Kira. "It's still early."

"I know you don't like it."

"I know you don't, either. It's funny, Andrei, I had a chance to go to the new ballet at the Marinsky tonight, and I didn't go because it was revolutionary, and here I am looking at this epic."

"You had a chance to go with whom?"

"Oh—a friend of mine."

"Not Léo Kovalensky?"

"Andrei! Don't you think you're being presu

"Kira, of all your friends he's the one . . ."

" . . . that you don't like. I know. Still, don't you think that you're mentioning it too often?"

"Kira, you're not interested in politics, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"You've never wanted to sacrifice your life senselessly, to have years torn out of it for no good reason, years of jail or exile? Have you?"

"What are you driving at?"

"Keep away from Leo Kovalensky."

Her mouth was open and her hand was lifted in the air and she did not move for a long second. Then she asked, and no words had ever been so hard to utter:

"What—do—you—mean—Andrei?"

"You don't want to be known as the friend of a man who is friendly with the wrong kind of people."

"What people?"

"Several. Our own Comrade Syerov, for one."

"But what has Leo . . ."

"He owns a certain private food store, doesn't he?"

"Andrei, are you being the G.P.U. agent with me and . . ."

"No, I'm not questioning you. I have nothing to learn from you. I'm just wondering how much you know about his affairs—for your own protection."

"What . . . what affairs?"

"That's all I can tell you. I shouldn't have told you even that much. But I want to be sure that you don't let your name be implicated, by chance, in any way."

"Implicated—in what?"

"Kira, I'm not a G.P.U. agent—with you or to you."

The lights went out and the orchestra struck up the "Internationale."

On the screen, a mob of dusty boots marched down a dry, clotted earth. A huge, gray, twinkling, shivering rectangle of boots hung before them, boots without bodies, thick, cobbled soles, old leather gnarled, warped into creases by the muscles and the sweat inside; the boots were not slow and they were not in a hurry; they were not hoofs and they did not seem to be human feet; they rolled forward, from heels to toes, from heels to toes, like gray tanks waddling, crushing, swamping all before them, clots of earth crumbling into dust, gray boots, dead, measured, endless, lifeless, inexorable.

Kira whispered through the roar of the "Internationale": "Andrei, are you working on a new case for the G.P.U.?"

He answered: "No. On a case of my own."

On the screen, shadows in gray uniforms sat around fires under a black sky. Calloused hands stirred iron kettles; a mouth grinned wide over crooked teeth; a man played a harmonica, rocking from side to side with a lewd grin; a man twirled in a Cossack dance, his feet flashing, his hands clapping in time; a man scratched his beard; a man scratched his neck; a man scratched his head; a man chewed a crust of bread, crumbs rolling into the open collar of his tunic, into a black, hairy chest. They were celebrating a victory.

Kira whispered: "Andrei, do you have something to report to the G.P.U.?"

He answered: "Yes."

On the screen, a demonstration marched down a city street, celebrating a victory. Banners and faces swam slowly past the camera. They moved as wax figures pulled by invisible wires, young faces in dark kerchiefs, old faces in knitted shawls, faces in soldiers' caps, faces in leather hats, faces that looked alike, set and humorless, eyes flat as if painted on, lips soft and shapeless, marching without stirring, marching without muscles, with no will but that of the cobblestones pulled forward under their motionless feet, with no energy but that of the red banners as sails in the wind, no fuel but the stuffy warmth of millions of skins, millions of flaccid, doughy muscles, no breath but the smell of patched armpits, of warm, weary, bowed necks, marching, marching, marching in an even, ceaseless movement, a movement that did not seem alive.

Kira jerked her head with a shudder that ran down to her knees and gasped: "Andrei, let's go!"

He rose swiftly, obediently.

When he motioned to a sleigh driver in the street outside, she said: "No. Let's walk. Walk. With both feet."

He took her arm, asking: "What's the matter, Kira?"

"Nothing," she walked, listening to the living sound of her heels crunching snow. "I . . . I didn't like the picture."

"I'm sorry, dear. I don't blame you. I wish they wouldn't make those things, for their own sake."

"Andrei, you wanted to leave it all, to go abroad, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you starting something . . . against someone . . . to help the masters you no longer want to serve?"

"I'm going to find out whether they're still worth serving."

"What difference would that make to you?"

"A difference on which the rest of my life may depend."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm giving myself a last chance. I have something to put before them. I know what they should do about it. I'm afraid I know also what they're going to do about it. I'm still a member of the Party. In a very short while, I'll know whether I'll remain a member of the Party."

"You're making a test, Andrei? At the cost of several lives?"

"At the cost of several lives that should be ended."

"Andrei!"

He looked at her white face, astonished: "Kira, what's the matter? You've never questioned me about my work. We've never discussed it. You know that my work deals with lives—and death, when necessary. It has never frightened you like this. It's something the two of us must keep silent about."

"Are you forbidding me to break that silence?"

"Yes. And there's something I have to tell you. Please listen carefully and don't answer me, because, you see, I don't want to know the answer. I want you to keep silent because I don't want to learn how much you know about the case I'm investigating. I'm afraid I know already that you're not quite ignorant about it. I'm expecting the highest integrity from the men I'm going to face. Don't make me face them with less than that on my part."

She said, trying to be calm, her voice quivering, a voice with a life and a terror of its own which she could not control:

"Andrei, I won't answer. Now listen and don't question me. Please don't question me! I have nothing to tell you but this: I'm begging you—you understand—begging you with all there is in me, if I ever meant anything to you, this is the only time I want to claim it, I'm begging you, while it's still in your hands, to drop this case, Andrei for one reason only, for me!"

He turned to her and she looked into a face she had never seen before, the implacable face of Comrade Taganov of the G.P.U., a face that could have watched secret executions in dark, secret cellars. He asked slowly: "Kira, what is that man to you?"

The tone of his voice made her realize that she could protect Leo best by remaining silent. She answered, shrugging: "Just a friend. We'll keep silent, Andrei. It's late. Will you take me home?"

But when he left her at her parents' house, she waited only to hear his steps dying around the corner. Then she ran through dark streets to the first taxi she could find and leaped in, ordering: "Marinsky Theater! As fast as you can go!"

In the dim, deserted lobby of the theater, she heard the thunder of the orchestra behind closed doors, a tuneless, violent jumble of sound.

"Can't go in now, citizen," said a stern usher.

She slipped a crumpled bill into his hand, whispering: "I have to find someone, comrade. . . . It's a matter of life and death . . . his mother is dying. . . ."

She slipped noiselessly between blue velvet curtains into a dark, half-empty theater. On the glittering stage a chorus of fragile ballerinas in short, flame-red tulle skirts fluttered, waving thin, powdered arms with gilded chains of papier-mâché, in a "Dance of the Toilers."

She found Leo and Antonio Pavlovna in comfortable arm-chairs in an empty row. They jumped up when they saw Kira slipping toward them down the long row of chairs, and someone behind them hissed: "Sit down!"

"Leo!" Kira whispered. "Come on! Right away! Something's happened!"

"What?"

"Come on! I'll tell you! Let's get out of here!"

He followed her up the dark aisle. Antonina Pavlovna waddled hurriedly after them, her chin pointing forward.

In a corner of the empty foyer, Kira whispered: "It's the G.P.U., Leo, they're after your store. They know something."

"What? How did you find out?"

"I just saw Andrei Taganov and he . . ."

"You saw Andrei Taganov? Where? I thought you were going to visit your parents."

"Oh, I met him on the street and . . ."

"What street?"

"Leo! Stop that nonsense! Don't you understand? We have no time to waste!"

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say much. Just a few hints. He told me to keep away from you if I didn't want to be arrested. He said you had a private food store, and he mentioned Pavel Syerov. He said he had a report to make to the G.P.U. I think he knows everything."

"So he told you to keep away from me?"

"Leo! You refuse to . . ."

"I refuse to be frightened by some jealous f

"Leo, you don't know him! He doesn't je matters. And he's not jealous of you. Why sh

"What department of the G.P.U. is he in

"Secret service department."

"Not the Economic Section, then?"

"No. But he's doing it on his own."

"Well, come on. We'll call Morozov and Pavel Syerov. Let Syerov call his friend of the Economic Section and find out what your Taganov's doing. Don't get hysterical. Nothing to be afraid of. Syerov's friend will take care of it. Come on."

"Leo," Antonina Pavlovna panted, running after them, as they hurried to a taxi outside, "Leo, I had nothing to do with the store! If there's an investigation, remember, I had nothing to do with it! I only carried money to Syerov and I knew nothing about where it came from! Leo, remember!"

An hour later, a sleigh drove noiselessly up to the back entrance of the store that carried the sign "Lev Kovalensky, Food Products." Two men slipped silently down frozen, unlighted stairs to the basement, where Leo and the clerk were waiting with a dim old lantern. The newcomers made no sound. Leo pointed silently to the sacks and boxes. The men carried them swiftly up the stairs to the sleigh. The sleigh was covered with a large fur blanket. In less than ten minutes, the basement was empty.

"Well?" Kira asked anxiously, when Leo came home.

"Go to bed," said Leo, "and don't dream of any G.P.U. agents."

"What did you do?"

"It's all done. We got rid of everything. It's on its way out of Red Leningrad this very minute. We had another load coming from Syerov tomorrow night, but we've cancelled that. We'll be running a pure little food store—for a while. Till Syerov checks up on things."

"Leo, I . . ."

"You won't start any arguments again. I've told you once: I'm not going to leave town. That would be the most dangerous, the most suspicious thing to do. And we have nothing to worry about. Syerov's too strong at the G.P.U. for any . . ."

"Leo, you don't know Andrei Taganov."

"No, I don't. But you seem to know him too well."

"Leo, they can't bribe him."

"Maybe not. But they can make him shut up."

"If you're not afraid . . ."

"Of course I'm not afraid!"

But his face was paler than usual and she noticed his hands, unbuttoning his coat, trembling.

"Leo, please! Listen!" she begged. "Leo, please! I . . ."
"Shut up!" said Leo.

XII

The executive of the Economic Section of the G.P.U. called Andrei Taganov into his office.

The office was in a part of the G.P.U. headquarters' building which no visitors ever approached and into which few employees were ever admitted. Those who were admitted spoke in low, respectful voices and never felt at ease.

The executive sat at his desk. He wore a military tunic, tight breeches, high boots and a gun on his hip. He had close-cropped hair and a clean-shaved face that betrayed no age. When he smiled, he showed short teeth and very wide, brownish gums. His smile betrayed no mirth, no meaning; one knew it was a smile only because the muscles of his cheeks creased and his gums showed.

He said: "Comrade Taganov, I understand you've been conducting some investigations in a case which comes under the jurisdiction of the Economic Section."

Andrei said: "I have."

"Who gave you the authority to do it?"

Andrei said: "My Party card."

The executive smiled, showing his gums, and asked: "What made you begin the investigation?"

"A piece of incriminating evidence."

"Against a Party member?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you turn it over to us?"

"I wanted to have a complete case to report."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"You intend to report it to the chief of your department?"

"Yes."

The executive smiled and said: "I suggest that you drop the entire matter."

Andrei said: "If this is an order, I'll remind you that you are not my chief. If it is advice, I do not need it."

The executive looked at him silently, then said: "Strict discipline and a straightforward loyalty are commendable traits Comrade Taganov. However, as Comrade Lenin said, a Communist must be adaptable to reality. Have you considered the consequences of what you plan to expose?"

"I have."

"Do you find it advisable to make public a scandal involving a Party member—at this time?"

"That should have been the concern of the Party member involved."

"Do you know my . . . interest in that person?"

"I do."

"Does the knowledge make any difference in your plans?"

"None."

"Have you ever thought that I could be of service to you?"

"No; I haven't."

"Don't you think that it is an idea worth considering?"

"No. I don't."

"How long have you held your present position, Comrade Taganov?"

"Two years and three months."

"At the same salary?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think a promotion desirable?"

"No."

"You do not believe in a spirit of mutual help and co-operation with your Party comrades?"

"Not above the spirit of the Party."

"You are devoted to the Party?"

"Yes."

"Above all things?"

"Yes."

"How many times have you faced a Party Purge Committee?"

"Three times."

"Do you know that there is another purge coming?"

"Yes."

"And you're going to make your report on that case you've investigated—to your chief?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At four o'clock this afternoon."

The executive looked at his wristwatch: "Very well. In an hour and a half then."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, Comrade Taganov."

*

A few days later, Andrei's chief called him into his office. The chief was a tall, thin man with a pointed blond beard and a gold pince-nez on a high, thin nose. He wore the expensive, blondish-brown suit of a foreign tourist; he had the long, knotty hands of a skeleton and the appearance of an unsuccessful college professor.

"Sit down," said the chief, and rose, and closed the door. Andrei sat down.

"Congratulations, Comrade Taganov," said the chief.

Andrei inclined his head.

"You have done a valuable piece of work and rendered a great service to the Party, Comrade Taganov. You could not have chosen a better time for it. You have put into our hands just the case we needed. With the present difficult economic situation and the dangerous trend of public sentiment, the government has to show the masses who is responsible for their suffering, and show it in a manner that will not be forgotten. The treacherous counter-revolutionary activities of speculators, who deprive our toilers of their hard-earned food rations, must be brought into the full light of proletarian justice. The workers must be reminded that their class enemies are plotting day and night to undermine the only workers' government in the world. Our toiling masses must be told that they have to bear their temporary hardships patiently and lend their full support to the government which is fighting for their interests against such heavy odds, as the case you've discovered will display to the public. This, in substance, was the subject of my conversation with the editor of the *Pravda* this morning, in regard to the campaign we are starting. We shall make an example of this case. Every newspaper, every club, every public pulpit will be mobilized for the task. The trial of Citizen Kovalensky will be broadcast into every hamlet of the U.S.S.R."

"Whose trial, comrade?"

"The trial of Citizen Kovalensky. Oh, yes, of course, by the way, that letter of Comrade Syerov which you attached to your report on the case—was that the only copy of it in existence?"

"Yes, comrade."

"Who has read it besides yourself?"

"No one."

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he chief folded his long, thin hands, the tips of his fingers resting, and said slowly: "Comrade Taganov, you will forget that you've ever read that letter."

Andrei looked at him silently.

"This is an order from the committee which investigated your report. However, I shall take the time to explain, for I appreciate your efforts in the matter. Do you read the newspapers, Comrade Taganov?"

"Yes, comrade."

"Do you know what is going on in our villages at the present time?"

"Yes, comrade."

"Are you aware of the mood in our factories?"

"Yes, comrade."

"Do you realize the precarious equilibrium of our public opinion?"

"Yes, comrade."

"In that case, I do not have to explain to you why a Party member's name must be kept from any connection with a case of counter-revolutionary speculation. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, comrade."

"You must be very careful to remember that you know nothing about Comrade Pavel Syerov. Am I understood?"

"Thoroughly, comrade."

"Citizen Morozov will resign from his position with the Food Trust—by reason of ill health. He will not be brought into the case, for it would throw an unfavorable light on our Food Trust and create a great deal of unnecessary comment. But the real culprit and dominant spirit of the conspiracy, Citizen Kovalensky, will be arrested tonight. Does that meet with your approval, Comrade Taganov?"

"My position does not allow me to approve, comrade. Only to take orders."

"Very well said, Comrade Taganov. Of course, Citizen Kovalensky is the sole legal, registered owner of that food store, as we've checked. He is an aristocrat by birth and the son of a father executed for counter-revolution. He has been arrested before—for an illegal attempt to leave the country. He is a living symbol of the class which our working masses know to be the bitterest enemy of the Soviets. Our working masses justly angered by lengthy privations, by long hours of waiting in lines at our co-operatives, by lack of the barest necessities, will know who is to blame for their hardships. They will know who strikes deadly blows at the very heart of our eco-

conomic life. The last descendant of a greedy, exploiting aristocracy will pay the penalty due every member of his class."

"Yes, comrade. A public trial with headlines in the papers and a radio microphone in the courtroom?"

"Precisely, Comrade Taganov."

"And what if Citizen Kovalensky talks too much and too near the microphone? What if he mentions names?"

"Oh, nothing to fear, Comrade Taganov. Those gentlemen are easy to handle. He'll be promised life to say only what he's told to say. He'll be expecting a pardon even when he hears his death sentence. One can make promises, you know. One doesn't always have to keep them."

"And when he faces the firing squad—there will be no microphone on hand?"

"Precisely."

"And, of course, it won't be necessary to mention that he was jobless and starving at the time he entered the employ of those unnamed persons."

"What's that, Comrade Taganov?"

"A helpful suggestion, comrade. It will also be important to explain how a penniless aristocrat managed to lay his hands on the very heart of our economic life."

"Comrade Taganov, you have a remarkable gift for platform oratory. Too remarkable a gift. It is not always an asset to an agent of the G.P.U. You should be careful lest it be appreciated and you find yourself sent to a nice post—in the Turkestan, for instance—where you will have full opportunity to display it. Like Comrade Trotzky, for instance."

"I have served in the Red Army under Comrade Trotzky."

"I wouldn't remember that too often, Comrade Taganov, if I were you."

"I won't, comrade. I shall do my best to forget it."

"At six o'clock tonight, Comrade Taganov, you will report for duty to search Citizen Kovalensky's apartment for any additional evidence or documents pertaining to this case. And you will arrest Citizen Kovalensky."

"Yes, comrade."

"That's all, Comrade Taganov."

"Yes, comrade."

*

The executive of the Economic Section smiled, showing his gums, at Comrade Pavel S. coldly: "Hereafter, Comrade Syerov, you will

literary efforts to matters pertaining to your job on the railroad."

"Oh, sure, pal," said Pavel Syerov. "Don't worry."

"I'm not the one to worry in this case, I'll remind you."

"Oh, hell, I've worried till I'm seasick. What do you want? One has only so many hairs to turn gray."

"But only one head under the hair."

"What . . . what do you mean? You have the letter, haven't you?"

"Not any more."

"Where is it?"

"In the furnace."

"Thanks, pal."

"You have good reason to be grateful."

"Oh, sure. Sure, I'm grateful. A good turn deserves another. An eye for an eye . . . how does the saying go? I keep my mouth shut about some things and you keep others shut for me about my little sins. Like good pals."

"It's not as simple as that, Syerov. For instance, your aristocratic playmate, Citizen Kovalensky, will have to go on trial and . . ."

"Hell, do you think that will make me cry? I'll be only too glad to see that arrogant bum get his white neck twisted."

*

"Your health, Comrade Morozov, requires a long rest and a trip to a warmer climate," said the official. "That is why, in acknowledgment of your resignation, we are giving you this assignment to a place in a House of Rest. You understand?"

"Yes," said Morozov, mopping his forehead, "I understand."

"It is a pleasant sanatorium in the Crimea. Restful and quiet. Far from the noise of the cities. It will help your health a great deal. I would suggest that you take full advantage of the privilege for, let us say, six months. I would not advise you to hurry back, Comrade Morozov."

"No," said Morozov, "I won't hurry."

"And there's another advice I would like to give you, Comrade Morozov. You are going to hear a great deal, from the newspapers, about the trial of a certain Citizen Kovalensky for counter-revolutionary speculation. It would be wise to let your fellow patients in the sanatorium understand that you know nothing about the case."

"Of course, comrade. I don't know a thing about it. Not a thing."

The official bent toward Morozov and whispered bluntly, confidentially: "And if I were you, I wouldn't try to pull any wires for Kovalensky, even though he's going to the firing squad."

Morozov looked up into the official's face and drawled, his soft vowels blurring, trailing off into a whine, his wide, vertical nostrils quivering: "Who, me, pull any wires? For him? Why should I, comrade? Why should I? I had nothing to do with him. He owned that store. He alone. You can look up the registration. He alone. He can't prove I knew anything about . . . about anything. He alone. Sole owner. Lev Kovalensky—you can look it up."

*

Lavrov's wife opened the door.

She made a choked sound, like a hiccough, somewhere in her throat, and clamped her hand over her mouth, when she saw Andrei Taganov's leather jacket and the holster on his hip, and behind him—the steel blades of four bayonets.

Four soldiers entered, following Andrei. The last one slammed the door shut imperiously.

"Lord mercifull! Oh, my Lord mercifull!" wailed the woman, clasping a faded apron in both hands.

"Keep still!" ordered Andrei. "Where's Citizen Kovalensky's room?"

The woman pointed with a shaking finger and kept on pointing, foolishly, persistently, while the soldiers followed Andrei. She stared stupidly at the clothes rack in the lobby, at the old coats that seemed warm and creased to the lines of human bodies, hanging there while three thin, steel blades moved slowly past, and six boots stamped heavily, the floor sounding like a muffled drum. The soldier with the fourth bayonet remained standing at the door.

Lavrov jumped up when he saw them. Andrei crossed the room swiftly, without looking at him. A short, sharp movement of Andrei's hand, brusque and imperious as a lash, made one of the soldiers remain stationed at the door. The others followed Andrei into Leo's room.

Leo was alone. He sat in a deep armchair by the lighted fireplace, in his shirt sleeves, reading a book. The book was the first thing to move when the door was flung open—it descended slowly to the arm of the chair and a

closed it. Then, Leo rose unhurriedly, the glow of the fire flickering on the white shirt on his straight shoulders.

He said, smiling, his smile a scornful arc: "Well, Comrade Taganov, didn't you know that some day we would meet like this?"

Andrei's face had no expression. It was set and motionless like a passport photograph; as if lines and muscles were hardened into something which had no human meaning, something which was a human face in shape only. He handed to Leo a paper bearing official stamps; he said, in a voice which was a human voice only because it made sounds that were of the human alphabet: "Search warrant, Citizen Kovalensky."

"Go ahead," said Leo, bowing sternly, graciously, as if to a guest at a formal reception. "You're quite welcome."

Two swift movements of Andrei's hand sent one soldier to a chest of drawers and the other to the bed. Drawers clattered open; white stacks of underwear fell to the floor, from under huge, dark fists that dug swiftly, expertly and slammed the drawers shut with a bang, one after the other. A white pile grew on the floor, around black boots glistening with melting snow. A quick hand ripped the satin cover off the bed, then the quilt and the sheets; the thrust of a bayonet split the mattress open and two fists disappeared in the cut.

Andrei opened the drawers of a desk. He went through them swiftly, mechanically, his thumb running the pages of books in a quick, fan-shaped whirl, with a swishing rustle like the shuffling of a pack of cards; he threw the books aside, gathering all notes and letters, shoving them into his brief case.

Leo stood alone in the middle of the room. The men took no notice of his presence, as if their actions did not concern him, as if he were only a piece of furniture, the last one to be torn open. He was half-sitting, half-leaning against a table, his two hands on the edge, his shoulders hunched, his long legs sliding forward. The logs creaked in the silence, and things thudded against the floor, and the papers rustled in Andrei's fingers.

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you," said Leo, "by letting you find secret plans to blow up the Kremlin and overthrow the Soviets, Comrade Taganov."

"Citizen Kovalensky," said Andrei, as if they had never met before, "you are speaking to a representative of the G.P.U."

"You didn't think I had forgotten that, did you?" said Leo.

A soldier stuck a bayonet into a pillow, and little white flakes of down fluttered up like snowdrops. Andrei jerked the

door of a cabinet open; the dishes and glasses tinkled, as he piled them swiftly, softly on the carpet.

Leo opened his gold cigarette case and extended it to Andrei.

"No, thank you," said Andrei.

Leo lighted a cigarette. The match quivered in his fingers for an instant, then grew steady. He sat on the edge of the table, swinging one leg, smoke rising slowly in a thin, blue column.

"The survival," said Leo, "of the fittest. However, not all philosophers are right. I've always wanted to ask them one question: the fittest—for what? . . . You should be able to answer it, Comrade Taganov. What are your philosophical convictions? We've never had a chance to discuss that—and this would be an appropriate time."

"I would suggest," said Andrei, "that you keep silent."

"And when a representative of the G.P.U. suggests," said Leo, "it's a command, isn't it? I realize that one should know how to respect the grandeur of authority under all circumstances, no matter how trying to the self-respect of those in power."

One of the soldiers raised his head and made a step toward Leo. A glance from Andrei stopped him. The soldier opened a wardrobe and took Leo's suits out, one by one, running his hand through the pockets and linings.

Andrei opened another wardrobe.

The wardrobe smelled of a fine French perfume. He saw a woman's dresses hanging in a row.

"What's the matter, Comrade Taganov?" asked Leo.

Andrei was holding a red dress.

It was a plain red dress with a patent leather belt, four buttons, a round collar and a huge bow.

Andrei held it spread out in his two hands and looked at it. The red cloth spurted in small puffs between his fingers.

Then his eyes moved, slowly, a glance like a weight grating through space, to the line of clothes in the wardrobe. He saw a black velvet dress he knew, a coat with a fur collar, a white blouse.

He asked: "Whose are these?"

"My mistress's," Leo answered, his eyes fixed on Andrei's face, pronouncing the word with a mocking contempt that suggested the infamy of obscenity.

Andrei's face had no expression, no human meaning. He looked down at the dress, his lashes like two black lines on his sunken cheeks. Then he straightened the

"At nine o'clock, isn't it? We're all looking forward to it, Comrade Taganov. See you at nine."

"Yes," Andrei had answered.

He had walked slowly through the deep snow of the garden, up the long stairs, to his dark room.

A Club window was lighted in the palace and a yellow square fell across the floor. Andrei took off his cap, his leather jacket, his gun. He stood by the fireplace, kicking gray coals with his toe. He threw a log on the coals and struck a match.

He sat on a box by the fire, his hands hanging limply between his knees, his hands and his forehead pink in the darkness.

He heard steps on the landing outside, then a hand knocking sharply. He had not locked the door. He said: "Come in."

Kira came in. She slammed the door behind her and stood in the archway of his room. He could not see her eyes in the darkness; black shadows swallowed her eyes and forehead; but the red glow fell on her mouth, and her mouth was wide, loose, brutal.

He rose and stood silently, looking at her.

"Well?" she threw at him savagely. "What are you going to do about it?"

He said slowly: "If I were you, I'd get out of here."

She leaned against the archway, asking: "And if I don't?"

"Get out of here," he repeated.

She tore her hat off and flung it aside, she threw her coat off and dropped it to the floor.

"Get out, you—"

"—whore?" she finished for him. "Certainly. I just want to be sure you know that that's what I am."

He asked: "What do you want? I have nothing to say to you."

"But I have. And you'll listen. So you've caught me, haven't you, Comrade Taganov? And you're going to have your revenge? You came with your soldiers, with a gun on your hip, Comrade Taganov of the G.P.U., and you arrested him? And now you're going to use all your influence, all your great Party influence, to see that he's put before the firing squad, aren't you? Perhaps you'll even ask for the privilege of giving the order to fire? Go ahead! Have your revenge. And this is mine. I'm not pleading for him. I have nothing to fear any more. But, at least, I can speak. And I'll speak. I have so much to say to you, to all of you, and I've kept silent for so

long that it's going to tear me to pieces! I have nothing to lose. But you have."

He said: "Don't you think it's useless? Why say anything? If you have any excuses to offer . . ."

She laughed, a human laughter that did not sound human, that did not sound like laughter: "You fool! I'm proud of what I've done! Hear me! I don't regret it! I'm proud of it! So you think I loved you, don't you? I loved you, but I was unfaithful to you, on the side, as most women are? Well, then, listen: all you were to me, you and your great love, and your kisses, and your body, all they meant was only a pack of crisp, white, square, ten-ruble bills with a sickle and hammer printed in the corner! Do you know where those bills went? To a tubercular sanatorium in the Crimea. Do you know what they paid for? For the life of a man I loved long before I ever saw you, for the life of a body that had possessed mine before you ever touched it—and now you're holding him in one of your cells and you're going to shoot him. Why not? It's fair enough. Shoot him. Take his life. You've paid for it."

She saw his eyes, and they were not hurt, they were not angry. They were frightened. He said: "Kira . . . I . . . I . . . I didn't know."

She leaned back, and crossed her arms, and rocked softly, laughing: "So you loved me? So I was the highest of women, a woman like a temple, like a military march, like a god's statue? Remember who told me that? Well, look at me! I'm only a whore and you're the one who made the first payment! I sold myself—for money—and you paid it. Down in the gutter, that's where I belong, and your great love put me there. I thought you'd be glad to know that. Aren't you? So you think I loved you? I thought of Leo when you held me in your arms! When I spoke of love—I was speaking to him. Every kiss you got, every word, every hour was given to him, for him. I've never loved him as I loved him in your bed! . . . No, I won't leave you your memories. They're his. I love him. Do you hear me? I love him! Go ahead! Kill him. Nothing you can do to him will compare with what I've done to you. You know that, don't you?"

She stood, swaying, and her shadow rose to the ceiling, and the shadow rocked as if it were going to crash down.

He repeated helplessly, as if she were not present, as if he were hanging on to the syllables for support: "I didn't know. . . ."

"No, you didn't know. But it was very simple. And not very."

unusual. Go through the garrets and basements where men live in your Red cities and see how many cases like this you can find. He wanted to live. You think everything that breathes can live? You've learned differently, I know. But he was one who could have lived. There aren't many of them, so they don't count with you. The doctor said he was going to die. And I loved him. You've learned what that means, too, haven't you? He didn't need much. Only rest, and fresh air, and food. He had no right to that, had he? Your State said so. We tried to beg. We begged humbly. Do you know what they said? There was a doctor in a hospital and he said he had hundreds on his waiting list."

She leaned forward, her voice soft, confidential, she spread her hands out, trying to explain, suddenly gentle and business-like and childishly insistent, her lips soft and a little bewildered, and only her eyes fixed and in her eyes, alone, a horror that did not belong in a room where human beings lived but only in a morgue:

"You see, you must understand this thoroughly. No one does. No one sees it, but I do, I can't help it, I see it, you must see it, too. You understand? Hundreds. Thousands. Millions. Millions of what? Stomachs, and heads, and legs, and tongues, and souls. And it doesn't even matter whether they fit together. Just millions. Just flesh. Human flesh. And they—it—had been registered and numbered, you know, like tin cans on a store shelf. I wonder if they're registered by the person or by the pound? And they had a chance to go on living. But not Leo. He was only a man. All stones are cobblestones to you. And diamonds—they're useless, because they sparkle too brightly in the sun, and it's too hard on the eyes, and it's too hard under the hoofs marching into the proletarian future. You don't pave roads with diamonds. They may have other uses in the world, but of those you've never learned. That is why you had sentenced him to death, and others like him, an execution without a firing squad. There was a big commissar and I went to see him. He told me that a hundred thousand workers had died in the civil war and why couldn't one aristocrat die—in the face of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics? And what is the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics in the face of one man? But that is a question not for you to answer. I'm grateful to that commissar. He gave me permission to do what I've done. I don't hate him. You should hate him. What I'm doing to you—he did it first!"

He stood looking down at her. He said nothing. He did not move. He did not take his eyes off hers.

She walked toward him, her legs crossing each other, with a slow, unsteady deliberation, her body slouching back. She stood looking at him, her face suddenly empty and calm, her eyes like slits, her mouth a thin incision into a flesh without color. She spoke, and he thought that her mouth did not open, words sliding out, crushed, from between closed lips, a voice frightening because it sounded too even and natural:

"That's the question, you know, don't you? Why can't one aristocrat die in the face of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics? You don't understand that, do you? You and your great commissar, and a million others, like you, like him, that's what you brought to the world, that question and your answer to it! A great gift, isn't it? But one of you has been paid. I paid it. In you and to you. For all the sorrow your comrades brought to a living world. How do you like it, Comrade Andrei Taganov of the All-Union Communist Party? If you taught us that our life is nothing before that of the State—well then, are you really suffering? If I brought you to the last hell of despair—well then, why don't you say that one's own life doesn't really matter?" Her voice was rising, like a whip, lashing him ferociously on both cheeks. "You loved a woman and she threw your love in your face? But the proletarian mines in the Don Basin have produced a hundred tons of coal last month! You had two altars and you saw suddenly that a harlot stood on one of them, and Citizen Morozov on the other? But the Proletarian State has exported ten thousand bushels of wheat last month! You've had every beam knocked from under your life? But the Proletarian Republic is building a new electric plant on the Volga! Why don't you smile and sing hymns to the toil of the Collective? It's still there, your Collective. Go and join it. Did anything really happen to you? It's nothing but a personal problem of a private life, the kind that only the dead old world could worry about, isn't it? Don't you have something greater—greater is the word your comrades use—left to live for? Or do you, Comrade Taganov?"

He did not answer.

Her arms were thrown wide, and her breasts stood out under her old dress, panting, and he thought he could see every muscle of her body, a female's body in the last convulsion of rage. She screamed:

"Now look at me! Take a good look! I was born and I was alive and I knew what I wanted. What do you

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live in me? Why do you think I'm alive? Because I have a stomach and eat and digest the food? Because I breathe and work and produce more food to digest? Or because I know what I want, and that something which knows how to want—isn't that life itself? And who—in this damned universe—who can tell me why I should live for anything but for that which I want? Who can answer that in human sounds that we should want. You came as a solemn army to bring a new life to men. You tore that life you knew nothing about, out of their guts—and you told them what it had to be. You too in the farthest corners of their souls—and you told them what it had to be. You came and you forbade life to the living. You've driven us all into an iron cellar and you've closed all doors, and you've locked us airtight, airtight till the blood vessels of our spirits burst! Then you stare and wonder what it's doing to us. Well, then, look! All of you who have eyes left—look!"

She laughed, her shoulders shaking, stepping close to him. She screamed at his face:

"Why do you stand there? Why don't you speak? Are you wondering why you've never known what I was? Well, here I am! Here's what's left after you took him, after you reached for the heart of my life—and do you know what that is? Do you know what it meant when you reached for my highest reverence . . ."

She stopped short. She gasped, a choked little sound, as if he had slapped her. She slammed the back of her hand against her mouth. She stood in silence, her eyes staring at something she had seen suddenly, clearly, fully for the first time.

He smiled, very slowly, very gently. He stretched out his hands, palms up, shrugging sadly an explanation she did not need.

She moaned: "Oh, Andrei! . . ."

She backed away from him, her terrified eyes holding him.

He said slowly: "Kira, had I been in your place, I would have done the same—for the person I loved—for you."

She moaned, her hand at her mouth: "Oh, Andrei, Andrei, what have I done to you?"

She stood before him, her body sagging, looking suddenly like a frightened child with eyes too big for its white face.

He approached her and took her hand from her mouth, held it in his steady fingers. He said, and his words were

the steps of a man making an immense effort to walk too steadily: "You're done me a great favor by coming here and telling me what you've told. Because, you see, you've given me back what I thought I'd lost. You're still what I thought you were. More than I thought you were. Only . . . it's not anything you've done to me . . . it's what you had to suffer and I . . . I gave you that suffering, and all those moments were to you . . . to you . . ."

His voice broke. Then he shook his head, and his voice was firm as a doctor's: "Listen, child, we won't talk any more. I want you to keep silent for a little while, quite silent, even silent inside, you understand? Don't think. Try not to think. You're trembling. You have to rest. Here. I want you to sit down and just sit still for a few minutes."

He led her to a chair, and her head fell on his shoulder, and she whispered: "But . . . Andrei . . . You . . ."

"Forget that. Forget everything. Everything will be all right. Just sit still and don't think."

He lifted her gently and put her down on a chair by the fire. She did not resist. Her body was limp; her dress was pulled high above her knees. He saw her legs trembling. He took his leather jacket and wrapped it around her legs. He said: "This will keep you warm. It's cold here. The fire hasn't been on long enough. Now sit still."

She did not move. Her head fell back against the edge of the chair; her eyes were closed; one arm hung limply by her side, and the pink glow of the fire twinkled softly on her motionless hand.

He stood in the darkness by the fireplace and looked at her. Somewhere in the Club someone was playing the "Internationale."

He did not know how long he had stood there, when she stirred and raised her head. He asked: "Do you feel better now?"

Her head moved feebly, trying to nod.

He said: "Now let's put your coat on and I'll take you home. I want you to go to bed. Rest and don't think of anything."

She did not resist. Her head bent, she watched his fingers buttoning her coat. Then she raised her head, and her eyes looked into his. His eyes smiled at her, in quiet understanding, as he had smiled on their first meetings at the Institute.

He helped her down the long, frozen stairs. He called a sleigh at the garden gate and gave the address of her home,

o's home. He buttoned the fur blanket over her knees, and his arm held her as the sleigh tore forward. They rode in silence.

When the sleigh stopped, he said: "Now I want you to rest for a few days. Don't go anywhere. There's nothing you can do. Don't worry about . . . him. Leave that to me."

The snow was deep at the curb by the sidewalk. He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the door and up the stairs. She whispered, and there was no sound, but he saw the movements of her lips: ". . . Andrei. . . ."

He said: "Everything will be all right."

He returned to the sleigh, alone. He gave the driver the address of the Party Club, where his comrades were waiting for a report on the agrarian situation.

*

". . . and you've locked us airtight, airtight till the blood vessels of our spirits burst! You've taken upon your shoulders a burden such as no shoulders in history have ever carried! You said that your end justified your means. But your end, comrades? What is your end?"

The chairman of the Club struck his desk with his gavel. "Comrade Taganov, I'm calling you to order!" he cried. "You will kindly confine your speech to the report on the agrarian situation."

A wave of motion rippled through the crowded heads, down the long, dim hall, and whispers rose, and somewhere in the back row someone giggled.

Andrei Taganov stood on the speaker's platform. The hall was dark. A single bulb burned over the chairman's desk. Andrei's black leather jacket merged into the black wall behind him. Three white spots stood out, luminous in the darkness: his two long, thin hands and his face. His hands moved slowly over a black void; his face had dark shadows in the eyesockets, in the hollows of the cheekbones. He said, his voice dull, as if he could not hear his own words:

"Yes, the agrarian situation, comrades . . . In the last twelve months, twenty-six Party members have been assassinated in our outlying village districts. Eight clubhouses have been burned. Also three schools and a Communal Farm storehouse. The counter-revolutionary element of village board has to be crushed without mercy. Our Moscow chief cites the example of the village Petrovshino where, upon their refusal to surrender their leaders, the peasants were lined in a

and every third one was shot, while the rest stood waiting. The peasants had locked three Communists from the city in the local Club of Lenin and boarded the windows on the outside and set fire to the house. . . . The peasants stood and watched it burn and sang, so they would hear no cries. . . . They were wild beasts. . . . They were beasts run amuck, beasts crazed with misery. . . . Perhaps there, too—in those lost villages somewhere so far away—there, too, they have girls, young and straight and more precious than anything on earth, who are driven into the last hell of despair, and men who love them more than life itself, who have to stand by and see it and watch it and have no help to offer! Perhaps they too”

“Comrade Taganov!” roared the chairman. “I’m calling you to order!”

“Yes, Comrade Chairman. . . . Our Moscow chief cites the What was I saying, Comrade Chairman? Yes, the hoarders’ element in the villages Yes The Party has to take extraordinary measures against the counter-revolutionary element in the villages, that threatens the progress of our great work among the peasant masses. . . . Our great work. . . . We came as a solemn army and forbade life to the living. We thought everything that breathed knew how to live. Does it? And aren’t those who know how to live, aren’t they too precious to be sacrificed in the name of any cause? What cause is greater than those who fight for it? And aren’t those who know how to fight, aren’t they the cause itself and not the means?”

“Comrade Taganov!” roared the chairman. “I’m calling you to order!”

“I’m here to make a report to my Party comrades, Comrade Chairman. It’s a very crucial report and I think they should hear it. Yes, it’s about our work in the villages, and in the cities, and among the millions, the living millions. Only there are questions. There are questions that must be answered. Why should we be afraid if we can answer them? But if we can’t . . . ? If we can’t? Comrades! Brothers! Listen to me! Listen, you consecrated warriors of a new life! Are we sure we know what we are doing? No one can tell men what they must live for. No one can take that right—because there are things in men, in the best of us, which are above all states, above all collectives! Do things? Man’s mind and his values. Look intently and fearlessly. Look and don’t tell me

one, just tell yourself: what are you living for? Aren't you living for yourself and only for yourself? Call it your aim your love, your cause—isn't it still *your* cause? Give your life die for your ideal—isn't it still *your* ideal? Every honest man lives for himself. Every man worth calling a man live for himself. The one who doesn't—doesn't live at all. You cannot change it. You cannot change it because that's the way man is born, alone, complete, an end in himself. No laws no Party, no G.P.U. will ever kill that thing in man which knows how to say 'I.' You cannot enslave man's mind, you can only destroy it. You have tried. Now look at what you're getting. Look at those whom you allow to triumph. Deny the best in men—and see what will survive. Do we want the crippled creeping, crawling, broken monstrosities that we're producing? Are we not castrating life in order to perpetuate it?"

"Comrade Taganov . . ."

"Brothers! Listen! We have to answer this!" The two luminous white hands flew up over a black void, and his voice rose, ringing, as it had risen in a dark valley over the White trenches many years ago. "We have to answer this! If we don't—history will answer it for us. And we shall go down with a burden on our shoulders that will never be forgiven! What is our goal, comrades? What are we doing? Do we want to feed a starved humanity in order to let it live? Or do we want to strangle its life in order to feed it?"

"Comrade Taganov!" roared the chairman. "I deprive you of speech!"

"I . . . I . . ." panted Andrei Taganov, staggering down the platform steps. "I have nothing more to say. . . ."

He walked out, down the long aisle, a tall, gaunt, lonely figure. Heads turned to look at him. Somewhere in the back someone whistled through his teeth, a long, low, sneering triumphant sound.

When the door closed after him, someone whispered:

"Let Comrade Taganov wait for the next Party purge!"

XIV

Comrade Sonia sat at the table, in a faded lavender kimono, with a pencil behind her ear. The kimono did not meet in front, for she had grown to proportions that could not be concealed any longer. She bent under the lamp, running through the pages of a calendar; she seized the pencil once in a while, jotting hurried notes down on a scrap of paper, and bit the pencil, a purple streak spreading on her lower lip, for the pencil was indelible.

Pavel Syerov lay on the davenport, his stocking feet high on its arm, reading a newspaper, chewing sunflower seeds. He spat the shells into a pile on a newspaper spread on the floor by the davenport. The shells made a little sizzling sound, leaving his lips. Pavel Syerov looked bored.

"Our child," said Comrade Sonia, "will be a new citizen of a new state. It will be brought up in the free, healthy ideology of the proletariat, without any bourgeois prejudices to hamper its natural development."

"Yeah," said Pavel Syerov without looking up from his newspaper.

"I shall have it registered with the Pioneers, the very day it's born. Won't you be proud of your living contribution to the Soviet future, when you see it marching with other little citizens, in blue trunks and with a red kerchief around its neck?"

"Sure," said Pavel Syerov, spitting a shell down on the newspaper.

"We'll have a real Red christening. You know, no priests, only our Party comrades, a civil ceremony, and appropriate speeches. I'm trying to decide on a name and . . . Are you listening to me, Pavel?"

"Sure," said Syerov, sticking a seed between his teeth.

"There are many good suggestions for new, revolutionary names here in the calendar, instead of the foolish old saints' names. I've copied some good ones. Now what do you think? If it's a boy, I think Ninel would be nice."

"What the hell's that?"

"Pavel, I won't tolerate such language and such ignorance! You haven't given a single thought to your child's name, have you?"

"Well, say, I still have time, haven't I?"

"You're not interested, that's all, don't you fool me, Pavel Syerov, and don't you fool yourself thinking I'll forget it!"

"Aw, come on, now, Sonia, really, you know, I'm leaving the name up to you. You know best."

"Yes. As usual. Well, Ninel is our great leader Lenin's name—reversed. Very appropriate. Or we could call him Vil—that's for our great leader's initials—Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin. See?"

"Yeah. Well, either one's good enough for me."

"Now, if it's a girl—and I hope it's a girl, because the new woman is coming into her own and the future belongs, to a greater extent than you men imagine, to the free woman of the proletariat—well, if it's a girl, I have some good names here, but the one I like best is Octiabrina, because that would be a living monument to our great October Revolution."

"Sort of . . . long, isn't it?"

"What of it? It's a very good name and very popular. You know, Fimka Popova, she had a Red christening week before last and that's what she called her brat—Octiabrina. Even got a notice in the paper about it. Her husband was so proud—the blind fool!"

"Now, Sonia, you shouldn't insinuate . . ."

"Listen to the respectable moralist! That bitch Fimka is known as a . . . Oh, to hell with her! But if she thinks she's the only one to get a notice in the paper about her litter, I'll . . . I've copied some other names here, too. Good modern ones. There's Marxina, for Karl Marx. Or else Communara. Or . . ."

Something clattered loudly under the table.

"Oh, hell!" said Comrade Sonia. "Those damn slippers of mine!" She wriggled uncomfortably on her chair, stretching out one leg, her foot groping under the table. She found the slipper and bent painfully over her abdomen, pulling the slipper on by a flat, wornout heel. "Look at the old junk I have to wear! And I need so many things, and with the child coming . . . You would choose a good time to write certain literary compositions and ruin everything, you drunken fool!"

"Now we won't bring that up again, Sonia. You know I was lucky to get out of it as I did."

"Yeah! Well, I hope your Kovalensky gets the firing squad

and a nice, loud trial. I'll see to it that the women of the Zhenotdel stage a demonstration of protest against Speculators and Aristocrats!" She fingered the pages of the calendar and cried: "Here's another good one for a girl: Tribuna. Or—Barricada. Or, if we prefer something in the spirit of modern science: Universiteta."

"That's too long," said Syerov.

"I prefer Octiabrina. More symbol to that. I hope it's a girl. Octiabrina Syerova—the leader of the future. What do you want it to be, Pavel, a boy or a girl?"

"I don't care," said Syerov, "so long as it isn't twins."

"Now I don't like that remark at all. It shows that you . . ."

They heard a knock at the door. The knock seemed too loud, too peremptory. Syerov, his head up, dropped the newspaper and said: "Come in."

Andrei Taganov entered and closed the door. Comrade Sonia dropped her calendar. Pavel Syerov rose slowly to his feet.

"Good evening," said Andrei.

"Good evening," said Syerov, standing, watching him fixedly.

"What's the big idea, Taganov?" Comrade Sonia asked, her voice low, husky, menacing.

Andrei did not turn to her. He said: "I want to speak to you, Syerov."

"Go ahead," said Syerov without moving.

"I said I want to speak to you alone."

"I said go ahead," Syerov repeated.

"Tell your wife to get out."

"My husband and I," said Comrade Sonia, "have no secrets from each other."

"You get out of here," said Andrei, without raising his voice, "and wait in the corridor."

"Pavel! If he . . ."

"You'd better go, Sonia," said Syerov slowly, without looking at her, his eyes fixed on Andrei.

Comrade Sonia coughed out a single chuckle from the corner of her mouth: "Comrade Taganov still going strong, eh? Well, we shall see what we shall see and we don't have long to wait."

She gathered her lavender kimono, pressed her abdomen, stuck a cigarette into her mouth, and slipped the slippers flapping against her heels.

"I thought," said Pavel Syerov, "that you had learned a lesson in the last few days."

"I have," said Andrei.

"What else do you want?"

"You'd better put your shoes on while I'm talking. You're going out and you haven't much time to lose."

"Am I? Glad you let me in on the little secret. Otherwise I might have said that I had no such intention. And maybe I'll still say it. Where am I going, according to Comrade Mussolini Taganov?"

"To release Leo Kovalensky."

Pavel Syerov sat down heavily and his feet scattered the pile of sunflower-seed shells over the floor. "What are you up to, Taganov? Gone insane, have you?"

"You'd better keep still and listen. I'll tell you what you have to do."

"You'll tell me what I have to do? Why?"

"And after that, I'll tell you why you will do it. You'll dress right now and go to see your friend. You know what friend I mean. The one at the G.P.U."

"At this hour?"

"Get him out of bed, if necessary. What you'll tell him and how you'll tell it, is none of my business. All I have to know is that Leo Kovalensky is released within forty-eight hours."

"Now will you let me in on the little magic wand that will make me do it?"

"It's a little paper wand, Syerov. Two of them."

"Written by whom?"

"You."

"Huh?"

"Photographed from one written by you, to be exact."

Syerov rose slowly and leaned with both hands on the table. "Taganov, you God-damn rat!" he hissed. "It's a rotten time to be joking."

"Am I?"

"Well, I'll go to see my friend all right. And you'll see Leo Kovalensky all right—and it won't take you forty-eight hours, either. I'll see to it that you get the cell next to his and then we'll find out what documents . . ."

"There are two photostats of it, as I said. Only I don't happen to have either one of them."

"What . . . what did you . . ."

"They're in the possession of two friends I can trust. It would be useless to try to find out their names. You know me

well enough to discard any idea of the G.P.U. torture chamber, if that idea occurs to you. Their instructions are that if anything happens to me before Leo Kovalensky is out—the photostats go to Moscow. Also—if anything happens to him after he's out."

"You God-d . . ."

"You don't want those photostats to reach Moscow. Your friend won't be able to save your neck, then, nor his own, perhaps. You don't have to worry about my becoming a nuisance. All you have to do is release Leo Kovalensky and hush up this whole case. You'll never hear of those photostats again. You'll never see them, either."

Syerov reached for his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "You're lying," he said hoarsely. "You've never taken any photostats."

"Maybe," said Andrei. "Want to take a chance on that?"

"Sit down," said Syerov, falling on the davenport.

Andrei sat down on the edge of the table and crossed his legs.

"Listen, Andrei," said Syerov. "Let's talk sense. All right, you're holding the whip. Still, do you know what you're asking?"

"No more than you can do."

"But, good Lord in Heaven, Andrei! It's such a big case and we're all set with a first-class propaganda campaign and the newspapers are getting headlines ready to . . ."

"Stop them."

"But how can I? How can I ask him? What am I going to tell him?"

"That's none of my business."

"But after he's already saved my . . ."

"Don't forget it's in his interests, too. He may have friends in Moscow. And he may have some who aren't friends."

"But, listen . . ."

"And when Party members can no longer be saved, they're the ones who get it worse than the private speculators, you know. Also a good occasion for first-class propaganda."

"Andrei, one of us has gone insane. I can't figure it out. Why do you want Kovalensky released?"

"That's none of your business."

"And if you've appointed yourself his guardian angel, then why the hell did you start the whole thing? You started it, you know."

"You said that I had learned a lesson."

"Andrei, haven't you got any Party honor left? We need a good smashing bang at the speculators right now, with food conditions as they are and all the . . ."

"That doesn't concern me any longer."

"You damn traitor! You said it was the only copy of the letter in existence, when you turned it in!"

"Maybe I was lying then."

"Listen, let's talk business. Here—have a cigarette."

"No, thank you."

"Listen, let's talk as friend to friend. I take back all those things I said to you. I apologize. You can't blame me, you know how it is, you can see it's enough to make a fellow lose his mind a little. All right, you have your own game to play I had mine and I made a misstep, but then we're both no innocent angels, as I can see, so we can understand each other. We used to be good friends, childhood friends, remember? So we can talk sensibly."

"About what?"

"I have an offer to make to you, Andrei. A good one. That friend of mine, he can do a lot if I slip a couple of words to him, as you know, I guess. I guess you know that I have enough on him for a firing squad, too. You're learning the same game, I see, and doing it brilliantly, I must hand it to you. All right, we understand each other. Now I can talk plain. I guess you know that your spot in the Party isn't so good any more. Not so good at all. And particularly after that little speech you made tonight—really, you know, it won't be so easy on you at the next Party purge."

"I know it."

"In fact, you're pretty sure to get the axe, you know."

"I do."

"Well, then, what do you say if we make a bargain? You drop this case and I'll see to it that you keep your Party card and not only that, but you can have any job you choose at the G.P.U. and name your own salary. No questions asked and no ill feeling. We all have our own way to make. You and I—we can help each other a lot. What do you say?"

"What makes you think that I want to remain in the Party?"

"Andrei . . ."

"You don't have to worry about helping me at the next purge. I may be kicked out of the Party or I may be shot or I may be run over by a truck. That won't make any difference to you. Understand? But don't touch Leo Kovalensky. See that no one touches him. Watch him as you would watch your

own child, no matter what happens to me. I am not his guardian angel. You are."

"Andrei," Syerov moaned, "what is that damned aristocrat to you?"

"I've answered that question once."

Syerov rose unsteadily and drew himself up for a last, desperate effort: "Listen, Andrei, I have something to tell you. I thought you knew it, but I guess you don't. Only pull yourself together and listen, and don't kill me on the first word. I know there's a name you don't want to be mentioned, but I'll mention it. It's Kira Argounova."

"Well?"

"Listen, we're not mincing words, are we? Hell, not now we aren't. Well, then, listen: you love her and you've been sleeping with her for over a year. And. . . . Wait! Let me finish. . . . Well, she's been Leo Kovalensky's mistress all that time. . . . Wait! You don't have to take my word for it. Just check up on it and see for yourself."

"Why check up on it? I know it."

"Oh!" said Pavel Syerov.

He stood, rocking slowly from heels to toes, looking at Andrei. Then he laughed. "Well," he said, "I should have known."

"Get your coat," said Andrei, rising.

"I should have known," laughed Syerov, "why the saint of the Comm-party would go in for blackmail. You fool! You poor, virtuous, brainless fool! So that's the kind of grandstand you're playing! I should have known that the lofty heroics are a disease one never gets cured of! Come on, Andrei! Haven't you any sense left? Any pride?"

"We've talked long enough," said Andrei. "You seem to know a lot about me. You should know that I don't change my mind."

Pavel Syerov reached for his overcoat and pulled it on slowly, his pale lips grinning.

"All right, Sir Galahad or whatever it's called," he said. "Sir Galahad of the blackmail sword. You win—this time. It's no use threatening you with any retaliation. Fellows like you get theirs without any help from fellows like me. In a year—this little mess will be forgotten. I'll be running the railroads of the U.S.S.R. and buying satin diapers for my brat. You'll be standing in line for a pot of soup—and maybe you'll get it. But you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that your sweetheart is being . . . by a man you hate!"

"Yes," said Andrei. "Good luck, Comrade Syerov."

"Good luck, Comrade Taganov."

*

Kira sat on the floor, folding Leo's underwear, putting it back into the drawer. Her dresses were still piled in a heap before her open wardrobe. Papers rustled all over the room when she moved. Down from the torn pillows fluttered like snow over the furniture.

She had not been out for two days. She had heard no sound from the world beyond the walls of her room. Galina Petrovna had telephoned once and wailed into the receiver; Kira had told her not to worry and please not to come over; Galina Petrovna had not come.

The Lavrovs had decided that their neighbor was not shaken by her tragedy; they heard no tears; they noticed nothing unusual in the frail little figure whom they watched sidewise when they crossed her room on their way to the bathroom. They noticed only that she seemed lazy, for her limbs fell and remained in any position, and it took her an effort to move them; and her eyes remained fixed on one spot and it took a bigger effort to shift her glance, and her glance was like a forty-pound sack of sand being dragged by a child's fist.

She sat on the floor and folded shirts neatly, creasing every pleat, slipping them cautiously into the drawer on the palms of her two hands. One shirt had Leo's initials embroidered on the breast pocket; she sat staring at it, without moving.

She did not raise her head when she heard the door opening.

"Allo, Kira," said a voice.

She fell back against the open drawer and it slammed shut with a crash. Leo was looking down at her. His lips drooped, but it was not a smile; his lips had no color; the circles under his eyes were blue and sharp, as if painted on by an amateur actor.

"Kira . . . please . . . no hysterics . . ." he said wearily.

She rose slowly, her arms swinging limply. She stood, her fingers crumpling the hair on her right temple, looking at him incredulously, afraid to touch him.

"Leo . . . Leo . . . you're not . . . free, are you?"

"Yes. Free. Released. Kicked out."

"Leo . . . how . . . how could it . . . happen . . . ?"

"How do I know? I thought you knew something about that."

She was kissing his lips, his neck, the muscles exposed by

his torn shirt collar, his hands, his palms. He patted her hair and looked indifferently over her head, at the wrecked room.

"Leo . . ." she whispered, looking up into his dead eyes, "what have they done to you?"

"Nothing."

"Did they . . . did they . . . I heard they sometimes . . ."

"No, they didn't torture me. They say they have a room for that, but I didn't have the privilege. . . . I had a nice cell all to myself and three meals a day, although the soup was rotten. I just sat there for two days and thought of what last words I could say before the firing squad. As good a pastime as any."

She took his coat off; she pushed him into an armchair; she knelt, pulling off his overshoes; she pressed her head to his knees for a second and jerked it away, and bent lower, to hide her face, and tied his unfastened shoestring with trembling fingers.

He asked: "Have I any clean underwear left?"

"Yes . . . I'll get it . . . only . . . Leo . . . I want to know . . . you haven't told me . . ."

"What is there to tell? I guess it's all over. The case is closed. They told me to see that I don't get into the G.P.U. for a third time." He added indifferently: "I think your friend Taganov had something to do with my release."

"He . . ."

"You didn't ask him to?"

"No," she said, rising. "No, I didn't ask him."

"Did they ruin the furniture completely, and the bed, too?"

"Who? . . . Oh, the search . . . No . . . Yes, I guess they have. . . . Leo!" she cried suddenly, so that he shuddered and looked at her, lifting his eyelids with effort. "Leo, have you nothing to say?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"Aren't you . . . aren't you glad to see me?"

"Sure. You look nice. Your hair needs combing."

"Leo, did you think of me . . . there?"

"No."

"You . . . didn't?"

"No. What for? To make it easier?"

"Leo, do you . . . love me?"

"Oh, what a question. . . . What a question at what a time. . . . You're getting feminine, Kira. . . . Really, it's not becoming. . . . Not becoming at all. . . ."

WE THE LIVING

"I'm sorry, dear. I know it's foolish. I don't know why I should ask it just then. . . . You're so tired. I'll get your overcoat and I'll fix your dinner. You haven't had dinner, have you?"

"No. I don't want any. Is there anything to drink in the house?"

"Leo. . . . you're not going. . . . again. . . . to. . . ."

"Leave me alone, will you? Get the hell out, please could you? Go to your parents. . . . or something. . . ."

"Leo!" She stood, her hands in her hair, staring down at him incredulously. "Leo, what have they done to you?"

His head was leaning back against the chair and she looked at the quivering white triangle of his neck and chin; he spoke, his eyes closed, only his lips moving, his voice even and flat: "Nothing. . . . No one's going to do anything to me any more. . . . No one. . . . Not you nor anyone else. . . ."

"No one can hurt me but you—and now you can't either. . . . No one. . . ."

"Leo!" She seized his limp, white-faced head and shook it furiously, pitilessly. "Leo! It can't get you like this! It won't get you!"

He seized her hand and flung it aside. "Will you ever come down to earth? What do you want? Want me to sing of life with little excursions to the G.P.U. between hymns? Afraid they've broken me? Afraid they'll get me? Want me to keep something that the mire can't reach, the more to suffer while it sucks me under? You're being kind to me, aren't you, because you love me so much? Don't you think you'd be kinder if you'd let me fall into the mire? So that I'd be one with our times and would feel nothing any longer. . . . nothing. . . . ever. . . ."

A hand knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Kira.

Andrei Taganov came in. "Good evening, Kira," he said and stopped, seeing Leo.

"Good evening, Andrei," said Kira.

Leo raised his head with effort. His eyes looked faintly startled.

"Good evening," said Andrei, turning to him. "I didn't know you were out already."

"I'm out. I thought you had reason to expect it."

"I did. But I didn't know they'd hurry. I'm sorry to intrude like this. I know you don't want to see any visitors."

"It's all right, Andrei," said Kira. "Sit down."

"There's something I have to tell you, Kira." He turned to Leo: "Would you mind if I took Kira out—for a few minutes?"

"I certainly would," Leo answered slowly. "Have you any secrets to discuss with Kira?"

"Leo!" Her voice was almost a scream. She added, quietly, her voice still trembling: "Come on, Andrei."

"No," said Andrei calmly, sitting down. "It isn't really necessary. It's not a secret." He turned to Leo. "I just wanted to spare you the necessity of . . . of feeling indebted to me, but perhaps it would be better if you heard it, too. Sit down, Kira. It's perfectly all right. It's about his release from the G.P.U."

Leo was looking at him fixedly, silently, leaning forward. Kira stood, her shoulders hunched, her hands clasped behind her back, as if they were tied. She looked at Andrei; his eyes were clear, serene.

"Sit down, Kira," he said almost gently.

She obeyed.

"There's something you should know, both of you," said Andrei, "for your own protection. I couldn't tell you sooner, Kira. I had to be sure that it had worked. Well, it has. I suppose you know who's really behind your release. It's Pavel Syerov. I want you to know what's behind him—in case you ever need it."

"It's you, isn't it?" asked Leo, a faint edge of sharpness in his voice.

"Leo, keep quiet. Please!" said Kira, turning away not to see his eyes watching her.

"It's a letter," Andrei continued calmly. "A letter he wrote and you know what that was. The letter had been sent to me . . . by someone else. Syerov has powerful friends. That saved him. But he's not very brave. That saved you. The letter had been destroyed. But I told him that I had photostats of it and that they were in the possession of friends who would send them to higher authorities in Moscow—unless you were released. The case is killed. I don't think they'll ever bother you again. But I want you to know this, so that you can hold it over Syerov's head—if you need it. Let him think that you know the photostats are in good hands—and on their way to Moscow, if he makes one step in your direction. That's all. I don't think you'll ever need it. But it's a useful protection to have, in these times—and with your social record."

"And . . . the photostats?" Kira whispered. "Where are they actually?"

"There are no photostats," said Andrei.

A truck thundered in the street below and the window panes trembled in the silence.

Andrei's eyes met Kira's. Their eyes met and parted swiftly, for Leo was watching them.

It was Leo who spoke first. He rose and walked to Andrei, and stood looking down at him. Then he said: "I suppose I should thank you. Well, consider me grateful. Only I won't say that I thank you from the bottom of my heart, because in the bottom of my heart I wish you had left me where I was."

"Why?" Andrei asked, looking up at him.

"Do you suppose Lazarus was grateful when Christ brought him back from the grave—if He did? No more than I am to you, I think."

Andrei looked at him steadily; Andrei's face was stern; his words were a threat: "Pull yourself together. You have so much to live for."

Leo shrugged and did not answer.

"You'll have to close that store of yours. Try to get a job. Better not a very prominent one. You'll hate it. But you'll have to stick to it."

"If I can."

"You can. You have to."

"Do I?" said Leo, and Kira saw his eyes watching Andrei closely.

She asked: "Andrei, why did you want to tell us about Syerov's letter?"

"So that you'd know in case . . . in case anything happened to me."

"What is going to happen to you, Andrei?"

"Nothing . . . Nothing that I know of." He added, rising: "Except that I'm going to be thrown out of the Party, I think."

"It . . . it meant a lot to you, didn't it . . . your Party?"

"It did."

"And . . . and when you lose something that meant a lot to you, does it . . . make any difference?"

"No. It still means a lot to me."

"Will you . . . hate them for it . . . for throwing you out?"

"No."

"Will you . . . forgive them . . . some day?"

"I have nothing to forgive. Because, you see, I have a lot to be grateful for, in the past, when I belonged to—to the Party. I don't want them to feel that they had been . . . unjust. Or

at I blame them. I can never tell them that I understand. I would like them to know it."

"Perhaps they may be worried . . . although they have no right to question you any longer . . . about a life they may have broken . . ."

"If I could ask a favor—when they throw me out—I'd ask them not to worry about me. So that . . . in the Party annals . . . I won't become a wound, but a bearable memory. Then, my memories will be bearable, too."

"I think they'd grant you that . . . if they knew."

"I'd thank them . . . if I could."

He turned and took his cap from the table and said, buttoning his jacket: "Well, I have to go. Oh, yes, another thing: keep away from Morozov. I understand he's leaving town, but he'll be back and starting some new scheme. Keep away. He'll always get out of it and leave you to take the blame."

"Shall we . . . see you again, Andrei?" asked Kira.

"Sure. I'll be very busy—for a while. But I'll be around."

. . . Well, good night."

"Good night, Andrei."

"Wait a minute," said Leo suddenly. "There's something I want to ask you."

He walked to Andrei, and stood, his hands in his pockets, his lips spitting the words out slowly: "Just why did you do all this? Just what is Kira to you?"

Andrei looked at Kira. She stood, silent, erect, looking at them. She was leaving it up to him. He turned to Leo and answered: "Just a friend."

"Good night," said Leo.

The door had closed, and the door in Lavrov's room, and in the silence they heard the door in the lobby opening and closing behind Andrei. Then Kira tore forward suddenly. Leo could not see her face. He heard only a sound that was not a moan and not quite a cry. She ran out of the room, and the door slammed shut behind her, and the crystals of the chandelier tinkled softly.

She ran down the stairs, out into the street. It was morning. She felt the air like a scalding jet of steam striking her bare neck. Her feet felt very light and thin in their open slippers in the snow. She saw his tall figure walking away and she ran after him calling: "Andrei!"

He wheeled about and gasped: "Kira!"

a coat!"

He seized her arm and jerked her back into the house, into the dim little lobby at the foot of the stairs.

"Go back! Immediately!" he ordered.

"Andrei . . ." she stammered. "I . . . I . . ."

In the light of a lamp post from across the street, she saw him smiling slowly, gently, and his hand brushed the wet snow-flakes off her hair. "Kira, don't you think it's better—like this?" he whispered. "If we don't say anything—and just leave it to . . . to our silence, knowing that we both understand and that we still have that much in common?"

"Yes, Andrei," she whispered.

"Don't worry about me. You've promised that, you know. Go back now. You'll catch cold."

She raised her hand, and her fingers brushed his cheek slowly, barely touching it, from the scar on his temple to his chin, as if her trembling finger tips could tell him something she could not say. He took her hand and pressed it to his lips and held it for a long time. A car passed in the street outside through the glass door, the sharp beam of a headlight swept over their faces, licked the wall and vanished.

He dropped her hand. She turned and walked slowly up the stairs. She heard the door opening and closing behind her. She did not look back.

When she returned to her room, Leo was telephoning. She heard him saying: "Allo, Tonia? . . . Yes, I just got out. . . . I'll tell you all about it. . . . Sure, come right over. . . . Bring some. I haven't got a drop in the house. . . ."

*

Andrei Taganov was transferred from the G.P.U. to the job of librarian in the library of the Lenin's Nook of the Club of Women Houseworkers in the suburb Lesnoe.

The clubhouse was a former church. It had old wooden walls that let the wind through, to rustle the bright posters inside; a slanting beam of unpainted wood in the center, supporting a roof ready to cave in; a window covered with boards over the dusty remnants of a glass pane; and a cast-iron "Bourgeoise" that filled the room with smoke. There was a banner of red calico over the former altar, and pictures of Lenin on the walls, pictures without frames, cut out of magazines: Lenin as a child, Lenin as a student, Lenin addressing the Petrograd Soviet, Lenin in a cap, Lenin without a cap, Lenin in the Council of People's Commissars, Lenin in his coffin. There were shelves of books in paper covers, a sign that read:

"Proletarians of the World, Unite!" and a plaster bust of Lenin with a scar of glue across his chin.

Andrei Taganov tried to hold on.

At five o'clock, when store windows made yellow squares in the snow and the lights of tramways rolled like colored beads high over the dark streets, he left the Technological Institute and rode to Lesnoe, sitting at the window of a crowded tramway, eating a sandwich, for he had no time to eat dinner. From six to nine, he sat alone in the library of the Lenin's Nook of the Club of Women Houseworkers, wrote card indexes, glued torn covers, added wood to the "Bourgeoise," numbered books, dusted shelves, and said when a woman's figure in a gray shawl waddled in, shaking snow off her heavy felt-boots:

"Good evening, comrade. . . . No, 'The A B C of Communism' is not in. I have your reservation, comrade. . . . Yes, this is a very good book, Comrade Samsonova, very instructive and strictly proletarian. . . . Yes, Comrade Danilova, it is recommended by the Party Council as indispensable to the political education of a conscientious worker. . . . Please, comrade, do not draw pictures on library books in the future. . . . Yes, I know, comrade, the stove isn't very good, it always smokes this way. . . . No, we don't carry any books on birth-control. . . . Yes, Comrade Selivanova, it is advisable to get acquainted with all of Comrade Lenin's works in order to understand our great leader's ideology. . . . Please close the door, comrade. . . . Sorry, comrade, we have no rest-room. . . . No, we have no books by Mussolini. . . . No, we carry no love stories, Comrade Ziablova. . . . No, Comrade Ziablova, I can't take you to the Club dance Sunday. . . . No, 'The A B C of Communism' is not in, comrade. . . ."

In the offices of the G.P.U. they whispered: "Let Comrade Taganov wait for the next Party purge."

Comrade Taganov did not wait for the next Party purge.

On a Saturday evening, he stood in line at the district co-operative for his food rations. The co-operative smelled of kerosene and rotted onions. There was a barrel of sauerkraut by the counter, a sack of dried vegetables, a can of linseed oil, and bars of bluish Joukov soap. A kerosene lamp smoked on the counter. A line of customers stretched across the long, bare room. There was only one clerk; he had a sty over his left eye and he looked sleepy.

A little man stood in line ahead of Andrei. His coat collar was loose, with a greenish, greasy patch at the nape of his neck. His neck was thin and wrinkled, with an Adam's apple

like a chicken's crow. He fingered his ration card nervously and fidgeted, peering past the line at the counter. He sniffled sonorously, for he had a cold, and scratched his Adam's apple.

He turned and grinned amicably up at Andrei. "Party comrade?" he asked, pointing a gnarled finger at the red star on Andrei's lapel. "Me, too, comrade. Sure, Party member. Here's my star, too. Cold weather we're having, comrade. Awfully cold weather. I hope the dried vegetables aren't all gone before our turn comes, comrade. They're wonderful for making soup Julienne. Really should have meat for it, though, but I'll tell you a nice little trick: just let them soak overnight, then boil them in plain water, and when it's almost ready drop in a spoonful of sunflower-seed oil, just one spoonful, and it makes such nice grease spots float on the surface, just the same as if you had meat, never tell the difference. Yes, I sure like soup Julienne. Hope they're not all gone before our turn comes. He's not very fast, that clerk. Only I'm not complaining. No, please, don't think I'm complaining, comrade."

He peered at the counter, fingered his card, counted the coupons, scratched his Adam's apple, and whispered confidentially: "Only I hope the vegetables aren't all gone. And another thing: I wish they would give us all the stuff in the same place. We wait for the general products here, and tomorrow two hours at the bread store, and day after-tomorrow here again for kerosene. Still, I don't mind. Next week, they say, we're going to get lard. That will be a holiday, won't it? That's something to look forward to, isn't it?"

When Andrei's turn came, the clerk shoved the rations at him, seized his card impatiently and growled: "What the hell's the matter, citizen? Your coupon's half torn off."

"I don't know," said Andrei. "I must have torn it accidentally."

"Well, I could have refused to accept it, you know. Not supposed to be half torn off. I got no time to check on all of you mugs. See that it's right, next month."

"Next . . . month?" said Andrei.

"Yeah, and next year, too, or else go empty-bellied. . . . Next!"

Andrei walked out of the co-operative with a pound of sauerkraut, a pound of linseed oil, a bar of soap and two pounds of dried vegetables for soup Julienne.

He walked slowly, and the streets were white with a hard, polished snow, and men's heels cut sharp ridges, creaking. Snow sparkled like salt crystals in the white circles of lamp

posts; and in the yellow cones of light at store windows, snow twinkled like splinters of powdered fire. Under a soft, glassy fuzz of frost, a poster showed a husky giant in a red blouse, raising two arms imperiously, triumphantly to the red letters:

WE ARE THE BUILDERS OF A NEW HUMANITY!

Andrei's steps were steady, calm. Andrei Taganov was always calm when he had reached a decision.

He turned on the light, when he entered his room, and put his packages on the table. He took off his cap and jacket, and hung them on a nail in the corner. A strand of hair fell across his forehead; he brushed it back with a long, slow movement. He had left a few coals smouldering in the fireplace and the room was hot. He took off his coat and straightened the wrinkled sleeves of his shirt.

He looked around slowly. He saw some books on the floor, and picked them up, and put them neatly into a pile on the table.

He lighted a cigarette and stood in the middle of the room, his elbow pressed to his side, like a wax figure in a store window, motionless but for the slow movement of one forearm with a hand tracing an even line in the air, carrying to his lips a cigarette held in two long, straight fingers. Nothing moved in the room but that arm with a motionless hand, and the smoke rising slowly, at his lips, then at his shoulder, then at his lips again, the ashes falling to the floor.

When he felt a hot breath on his fingers and saw that the cigarette had burned, he threw the stub into the fireplace and walked to his table. He sat down and opened the drawers, one by one, and looked through their contents. He took out a few papers and gathered them into a pile on the table.

Then he rose and walked to the fireplace. He knelt and stuffed newspapers into the coals and blew at them until bright orange tongues leaped up. He threw two logs into the fire and stood, watching them until he saw white flames spurt from the creaking bark. Then he walked to the table, took the pile of papers he had selected and threw it into the fire.

Then he opened the old boxes that served as his wardrobe. There were the things he did not want to be found in his room. He took a girl's black satin robe and threw it into the fire. He watched the cloth shriveling slowly in red, glowing, flameless patches, with long, thin columns of smoke, with a heavy, acrid odor. He watched it, his eyes quiet, astonished.

Then he threw in a pair of black satin slippers, and a little lace handkerchief, and a lace jacket with white ribbons. A sleeve of the jacket rolled out on the blackened bricks by the fireplace; he bent and, lifting it delicately, placed it back over the flames.

Then he found "The American Resident," the little glass toy with a black imp in a red liquid. He looked at it, and hesitated, and put it cautiously down into the smouldering place. The glass tube cracked, and the liquid sizzled on the coals with a sharp little puff of steam, and "The Resident" rolled into a crack among the coals.

Then he took out the black chiffon nightgown.

He stood at the fireplace and held the gown in both hands, and his fingers crumpled slowly, softly the light silk that felt like a handful of smoke. He held it on his two palms, and looked at his fingers through the thin black film, and moved his fingers slowly.

Then he knelt and spread it over the fire. For a second, the red coals were dimmed as under a clouded black glass; then the gown shuddered, as in a gust of wind, and a corner of the hem curled up, and a thin blue flame shot out of a fold at the neckline.

He rose and stood watching it; he watched glowing red threads running down the black cloth, and the black film twisting, as if it were breathing, curling, shrinking slowly into a smoke light as the cloth.

He stood for a long time, looking at the motionless black thing with twinkling red edges, that still had the shape of a gown, but it was not transparent any longer.

Then he touched it softly with his foot. It crumbled almost before it was touched, and little black flakes fluttered up into the chimney.

He turned away and sat down at the table. He sat with one forearm resting on the table and the other on his knee, his hands hanging down, ten fingers motionless, straight, broke only by the small angles of the joints, so still that they seemed grown fast to the air. An old alarm clock ticked on a shelf. His face was grave, quiet. His eyes were gentle, astonished, wondering. . . .

Then he turned, and took a piece of paper from the drawer and wrote: "No one is to be held responsible for my death." And signed: "Andrei Taganov."

There was only one shot, and because the frozen man

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Then he turned, and took a piece of paper from the drawer, and wrote: "No one is to be held responsible for my death." And signed: "Andrei Taganov."

There was only one shot, and because the frozen marble

stairway was long and dark and led to a garden buried in deep snow, no one came up to investigate.

XV

On the front pages of the *Pravda*, a square in a heavy black frame carried the words:

The Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party expresses its profound grief at the death of a heroic fighter of the Revolution, former member of the Red Army, member of the Party since 1915,

COMRADE ANDREI TAGANOV

Under it, another square in a heavy black frame said:

The Leningrad Committee of the All-Union Communist Party sorrowfully announces the death of

COMRADE ANDREI TAGANOV

The funeral will take place tomorrow, on the Field of Victims of the Revolution. The procession will start from the Smolny Institute at 10 o'clock in the morning.

An editorial of the *Pravda* said:

Another name has been added to the glorious list of victims fallen on the field of honor of the Revolution. That name may not be known to many, but it represents and symbolizes the common ranks of our Party, the nursing heroes of our weekdays. In the person of Comrade Andrei Taganov, we pay a last tribute to the unknown warriors of the Army of the Proletariat. Comrade Taganov is dead. He committed suicide under the strain of a nervous collapse caused by overwork. His health and body were broken by the demanding, relentless work which his Party membership imposed upon him. Such was his way

WE THE LIVING

2
sacrifice to the Revolution. Such is the sacrifice of a Party that rules, not for the sake of personal loot and fame, like the rulers of capitalistic countries; but for the sake of assuming the hardest work, the most pitiless tasks in the service of the Collective. And if, in these days of struggle and privation, some of us may weaken in spirit, let us look up to the great All-Union Communist Party that leads us, that spares not its strength, its energy, its lives. Let us make the Red funeral of a Party hero an occasion of tribute to our leaders. Let all toilers of Leningrad join in the procession that will escort Comrade Taganov to his last place of rest.

In an office of the G.P.U., a man with a smile that showed his gums, said to Pavel Syerov: "Well, he gave us a good opportunity for a lot of useful noise, after all. You making the opening speech?"

"Yeah," said Syerov.

"Don't forget his Red Army record and all that. Well, I hope this will shut them up, those damn fools, some of those old dotards of the 1905 vintage, who showed an inclination to talk too much about his pre-October Party card and other things, the Kovalensky case among other things."

"Forget it," said Pavel Syerov.

*

The toilers of Leningrad marched behind a red coffin. Row after row, like walls, like the rungs of an endless ladder, they moved forward, swallowing Nevsky in the slow, rubbing, growing tide of bodies and banners, thousands of feet stepping in time, as if one gigantic pair of boots made Nevsky shudder in rhythm, from the statue of Alexander III to the columns of the Admiralty. Thousands of human boots marched gravely, flaming banners raised high in a last salute.

Soldiers of the Red Army came as khaki ramparts, after row of straight, husky shoulders, of boots firm and steady in the snow, of peaked caps with a red star on forehead, and over them—a red banner with gold lettering.

GLORY ETERNAL TO A FALLEN COMRADE

Workers of the Putilovsky factory came in gray, uniform ranks, moving slowly under a red banner held high in

HE CAME FROM THE WORKERS' RANKS.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE TO THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD.

THE PROLETARIAT THANKS ITS FALLEN FIGHTER.

Students of the Technological Institute followed, rows of young, earnest faces, of grave, clear eyes, of straight, taut bodies, of boys in black caps and girls in red kerchiefs, red as the banner that said:

THE STUDENTS OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE ARE PROUD
OF THEIR SACRIFICE TO THE CAUSE OF THE REVOLUTION

Members of his Party Collective, rows of black leather jackets, marched gravely, austere as monks, stately as warriors, their banner spread high and straight, without a wrinkle, a narrow red band with black letters, as sharp and plain as the men who carried it:

THE ALL-UNION COMMUNIST PARTY OFFERS ALL AND EVERY ONE
OF ITS LIVES TO THE SERVICE OF THE WORLD REVOLUTION

Every factory of Petrograd, every club, every office, every Union, every small, forgotten Cell rolled in a single stream, gray, black and red, through a single artery of the great city, three miles of caps and red kerchiefs and feet crunching snow and banners like red gashes in the mist. And the gray walls of Nevsky were like the sides of a huge canal where human waves played a funeral dirge on a snow hard as granite.

It was cold; a piercing, motionless cold hung over the city, heavy as a mist that cut into the walls, into the cracks of sealed windows, into the bones and skins under the heavy clothes. The sky was torn into gray layers of rags, and clouds were smeared on, like patches of ink badly blotted, with a paler ink under them, and a faded ink beneath, and then a water turbid with soap suds, under which no blue could ever have existed. Smoke rose from old chimneys, gray as the clouds, as if that smoke had spread over the city, or the clouds had belched gray coils into the chimneys and the houses were spitting them back, and the smoke made the houses seem unheated. Snowflakes fluttered down lazily, once in a while, to melt on indifferent, moving foreheads.

An open coffin was carried at the head of the procession.
The coffin was red. A banner of scarlet, regal velvet was

draped over a still body; a white face lay motionless on a red pillow, a clear, sharp profile swimming slowly past the gray walls, black strands of hair scattered on the red cloth, black strands of hair hiding a dark little hole on the right temple. The face was calm. Snowflakes did not melt on the still, white forehead.

Four honorary pall-bearers, his best Party comrades, carried the coffin on their shoulders. Four bowed heads were bared to the cold. The coffin seemed very red between the blond hair of Pavel Syerov and the black curls of Victor Dunaev.

A military band followed the coffin. The big brass tubes were trimmed with bows of black crêpe. The band played "You fell as a victim."

Many years ago, in secret cellars hidden from the eyes of the Czar's gendarmes, on the frozen roads of Siberian prison camps, a song had been born to the memory of those who had fallen in the fight for freedom. It was sung in muffled, breathless whispers to the clanking of chains, in honor of nameless heroes. It traveled down dark sidelanes; it had no author, and no copy of it had ever been printed. The Revolution brought it into every music store window and into the roar of every band that followed a Communist to his grave. The Revolution brought the "Internationale" to its living and "You fell as a victim" to its dead. It became the official funeral dirge of the new republic.

The toilers of Leningrad sang solemnly, marching behind the open red coffin:

*"You fell as a victim
In our fateful fight,
A victim of endless devotion.
You gave all you had to the people you loved,
Your honor, your life and your freedom."*

The music began with the majesty of that hopelessness which is beyond the need of hope. It mounted to an ecstatic cry, which was not joy nor sorrow, but a military salute. It fell, breaking into a pitiless tenderness, the reverent tenderness that honors a warrior without tears. It was a resonant smile of sorrow.

And feet marched in the snow, and the brass tubes thundered, and brass cymbals pounded each step into the earth, and gray ranks unrolled upon gray ranks, and scarlet banners swayed to the grandeur of the song in a solemn farewell.

*"The tyrant shall fall and the people shall rise,
Sublime, almighty, unchained!
So farewell, our brother,
You've gallantly made
Your noble and valiant journey!"*

Far beyond the rows of soldiers and students and workers, in the ranks of nameless stragglers that carried no banners, a girl walked alone, her unblinking eyes fixed ahead, even though she was too far away to see the red coffin. Her hands hung limply by her sides; above the heavy woolen mittens, her wrists were bare to the cold, frozen to a dark, purplish red. Her face had no expression; her eyes had: they seemed astonished.

Those marching around her paid no attention to her. But at the start of the demonstration, someone had noticed her. Comrade Sonia, leading a detachment of women workers from the Zhenotdel, had hurried past to take her place at the head of the procession, where she had to carry a banner; Comrade Sonia had stopped short and chuckled aloud: "Really, Comrade Argounova, you—here? I should think you'd be the one person to stay away!"

Kira Argounova had not answered.

Some women in red kerchiefs had passed by. One had pointed at her and whispered something, eagerly, furtively, to her comrades; someone had giggled.

Kira walked slowly, looking ahead. Those around her sang "You fell as a victim." She did not sing.

A red banner said:

PROLETARIANS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

A freckled woman with strands of rusty hair under a man's cap, whispered to her neighbor: "Mashka, did you get the buckwheat at the co-operative this week?"

"No. They giving any?"

"Yeah. Two pounds per card. Better get it before it's all gone."

A red banner said:

FORWARD INTO THE SOCIALISTIC FUTURE UNDER THE
LEADERSHIP OF LENIN'S PARTY!

A woman hissed through blackened stumps of teeth: "Oh,

hell! They would choose a cold day like this to make us march in another one of their cursed parades!"

"You fell a-a-as a vic-ti-i-im

In our fate— full fight,

A vic-tim of e-end-less de-vo-o-otion. . . ."

" . . . stood in line for two hours yesterday, but best onions you ever hope to see. . . ."

"Dounka, don't miss the sunflower-seed oil at the co-operative. . . ."

"If they don't get shot by someone, they shoot themselves— just to make us walk. . . ."

"You gave a-a-all you had fo-o-or the people you loved . . ."

A red banner said:

**TIGHTEN THE BONDS OF CLASS SOLIDARITY UNDER THE
STANDARD OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY!**

"God! I left soup cooking on the Primus. It will boil all over the house. . . ."

"Stop scratching, comrade."

"Your ho-nor, your li-fe and your free-ee-ee-edom. . . ."

"Comrade, stop chewing sunflower seeds. It's disrespectful. . . ."

"It's like this, Praskovia: you peel the onions and add a dash of flour, just any flour you can get, and then a dash of linseed oil and . . ."

"What do *they* have to commit suicide about?"

A red banner said:

**THE COMMUNIST PARTY SPARES NO VICTIMS IN ITS FIGHT
FOR THE FREEDOM OF MANKIND**

"There's a little closet under the back stairs and some straw and no one can hear us in there. . . . My husband? The poor sap will never get wise. . . ."

"Let the millet soak for a coupla hours before cooking. . . ."

"God! It's the seventh month, it is, and you can't expect me to have a figure like a match stick, and here I have to walk like this. . . . Yeah, it's my fifth one. . . ."

*"Thety-rant shall fall and thepeo-ple shallrise,
Sublime, al-mighty, unchai-ai-ai-ned! . . ."*

"Lord Jesus Christ! I bet the newspaper's grown fast to my kin. Ever use newspapers to keep your feet warm, comrade? Under the socks?"

"Makes your feet stink."

"Cover your mouth when you yawn like that, comrade."

"Damn these demonstrations! Who the hell was he, anyway?"

"You gave a-a-all you had fo-o-or the people you loved . . ."

The Field of Victims of the Revolution was a huge square in the heart of the city, on the shore of the Neva, a vast, white desert, stretching for half a mile, like a bald spot on the scalp of Petrograd. The iron lances of the Summer Garden fence stood on guard at one side of the Field, and behind them lay the white desolation of a park with bare trees that seemed made of black iron like the lances.

Before the revolution, it had been called the Field of Mars and long ranks of gray uniforms had crossed it in military drills. The revolution had erected a small square of rose granite slabs, a little island lost in the center of the Field. Under the slabs were buried the first victims fallen in the streets of Petrograd in February of 1917. The days since February of 1917 had added more granite slabs to the little island. The names carved on the granite had belonged to those whose death had been the occasion for a demonstration, whose last reward had been the honor of the title of "The Revolution's Victim."

Pavel Syerov mounted a block of red granite over a red coffin. His slender figure in a tight, new leather jacket and breeches and tall military boots stood sharply, proudly against the gray sky, his blond hair waved in the wind, and his arms rose solemnly, in blessing and exhortation, over a motionless sea of heads and banners.

and it was a privilege which I must share with all of you. Andrei Taganov was not a famous man, but he bore, proudly and gallantly, one title: that of a Communist. He came from the toilers' ranks. His childhood was spent at the proletarian work bench. He and I, we grew up together, and together we shared the long years of toil in the Putilovsky factory. We joined the Party together, long before the Revolution, in those dark days when a Party card was a ticket to Siberia or a mark for the Czar's hangman's noose. Side by side, Comrade Taganov and I fought in the streets of this city in the glorious days of October, 1917. Side by side, we fought in the ranks of the Red Army. And in the years of peace and reconstruction that followed our victory, the years which are harder and, perhaps, more heroic than any warfare, he did more than his share of the silent, modest, self-sacrificing work which your Party carries on for you, toilers of the U.S.S.R.! He fell as a victim to that work. But our sorrow at his death shall also be joy at his achievement. He is dead, but his work, our work, goes on. The individual may fall, but the Collective lives forever. Under the guidance of the Soviets, under the leadership of the great All-Union Communist Party, we are marching into a radiant tomorrow when the honest toil of free toilers will rule the world! Then labor will no longer be slavery, as it is in capitalistic countries, but a free and happy duty to that which is greater than our petty concerns, greater than our petty sorrows, greater than our very lives—the eternal Collective of a Proletarian Society! Our glorious dead shall be remembered forever, but we are marching on. Andrei Taganov is dead, but we remain. Life and victory are ours. Ours is the future!”

The applause rolled like a dull thunder to the houses of the city far away, to the snow of the Summer Garden, and red banners waved in the roar of clapping hands, rising to the gray sky. When the hands dropped and the heads turned their eyes to the red granite slab, Comrade Syerov was gone—and against the gray sky stood the trim, proud, resolute figure of Victor Dunaev, black curls waving in the wind, eyes sparkling, mouth open wide over lustrous white teeth, throwing into the silence the clear, ringing notes of a young, powerful voice:

“Comrade workers! Thousands of us are gathered here to honor one man. But one man means nothing in the face of the mighty Proletarian Collective, no matter how worthy his achievements. We would not be here, if that man were not more than a single individual, if he were not a symbol of something greater, which we are gathered here to honor. This is

ot a funeral, comrades, but a birthday party! We are not celebrating the death of a comrade, but the birth of a new humanity. Of that new humanity, he was one of the first, but not the last. The Soviets, comrades, are creating a new race of men. That new race terrifies the old world, for it brings death to all its outworn standards. What, then, are the standards of our new humanity? The first and basic one is that we have lost a word from our language, the most dangerous, the most insidious, the most evil of human words: the word 'I.' We have outgrown it. 'We' is the slogan of the future. The Collective stands in our hearts where that old monster—'self'—had stood. We have risen beyond the worship of the pocket-book, of personal power and personal vanity. We do not long for gold coins and gold medals. Our only badge of honor is the honor of serving the Collective. Our only aim is the honest toil which profits not one, but all. What is the lesson we are to learn here today and to teach our enemies beyond the borders? The lesson of a Party comrade dying for the Collective. The lesson of a Party that rules but to sacrifice itself to those it rules. Look at the world around you, comrades! Look at the fat, slobbering ministers of the capitalistic countries, who fight and stab one another in the back in their bloody scramble for power! Then look at those who rule you, who consecrate their lives to the unselfish service of the Collective, who carry the tremendous responsibility of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat! If you do, you will understand me when I say that the All-Union Communist Party is the only honest, fearless, idealistic body of men in the politics of the world today!"

The applause thundered as if the old cannons of the Peter-Paul Fortress across the river had been fired all at once. And it thundered again when Victor's black curls disappeared in the crowd, and the straight, stubby mane of Comrade Sonia waved high in the air, while she roared with all the power of her broad chest about the new duties of the new woman of the Proletariat. Then another face rose over the crowd, a thin, consumptive, unshaved face that wore glasses and opened a pale mouth wide, coughing words which no one could hear. Then another mouth spoke, and it could be heard far beyond the crowd, a mouth that bellowed sonorously through a thick, black beard. A freckled boy from the Communist Union of Youth spoke, stuttering, scratching his head. A tall spinster in a crumpled, old-fashioned hat spoke ferociously, opening

her small mouth as if she were at the dentist's, shaking thin finger at the crowd as at a school-room of disobedient pupils. A tall sailor spoke, his fists on his hips, and those the back rows laughed occasionally when they heard the front rows laughing, even though the words did not reach them.

Thousands stood, fidgeting nervously, knocking their heads together to keep them warm, burying their hands in their armpits, in their sleeves, in their fur lapels, breathing little white icicles on the old scarfs high under their noses. They took turns in holding the red banners, and those who held the poles pressed the poles tightly to their sides with their elbows, blowing on their frozen fingers. A few sneaked away, hurrying furtively down side streets.

Kirā Argounova stood without moving and listened attentively. She listened to every word. Her eyes held a question she hoped the words could answer.

Snowflakes fluttered lazily down on her bowed head, on the lashes of her eyes. Her lashes glistened with snowflakes, but without tears. She looked at the words cut into the red granite:

GLORY ETERNAL TO THE VICTIMS OF THE REVOLUTION

ANDREI TAGANOV

1896-1925

She wondered whether she had killed him, or the revolution had, or both.

XVI

Leo sat alone by the fireplace, smoking. A cigarette hung limply in his hand, then slipped out of his fingers; he did not notice it. He took another cigarette and held it unlighted for a long time, not noticing it. Then he glanced around for a match, and could not find it, even though the box lay on the arm of his chair. Then he picked up the match box and stared at it, puzzled, for he had forgotten what he wanted.

He had spoken little in the past two weeks. He had kissed Kira violently, once in a while, too violently, and she had felt his effort, and she had avoided his lips and his arms.

He had left home often and she had never asked him where he went. He had been drinking too often and too much, and she had not said whether she noticed it. When they had been alone together, they had sat silently, and the silence had spoken to her, louder than any words, of something which was an end. He had been spending the last of their money and she had not questioned him about the future. She had not questioned him about anything, for she had been afraid of the answer she knew: that her fight was lost.

When Kira came home from the funeral, Leo did not rise to his feet, but sat by the fireplace, not moving. He looked at her with a slow, curious, heavy glance between heavy eyelids.

Silently, she took off her coat and hung it in her wardrobe.

She was taking off her hat when a sound made her turn: Leo was laughing; it was a hard, bitter, brutal laughter.

She looked at him, her eyes wide: "Leo, what's the matter?"

He asked her fiercely: "Don't you know?"

She shook her head.

"Well, then," he asked, "do you want to know how much I know?"

"How much . . . you know . . . about what, Leo?"

"I don't suppose this is a good time to tell you, is it? Right after your lover's funeral?"

"My . . ."

He rose and approached her, and stood, his hands in his pockets, looking down at her with the arrogantly contemptuous look she worshipped, with the scornful, drooping smile; but his arched lips moved slowly to form three words: "You little bitch!"

She stood straight, without moving, her face white. "Leo . . ."

"Shut up! I don't want to hear a sound out of you! You rotten little . . . I wouldn't mind it, if you were like the rest of us! But you, with your saintly airs, with your heroic speeches, trying to make me walk straight, while you were . . . you were rolling under the first Communist bum who took the trouble to push you!"

"Leo, who . . ."

"Shut up! . . . No! I'll give you a chance to speak. I'll give you a chance to answer just one word. Were you Taganov's mistress? Were you? Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"All the time I was away?"

"Yes."

"And all the time since I came back?"

"Yes. What else did they tell you, Leo?"

"What else did you want them to tell me?"

"Nothing."

He looked at her; his eyes were suddenly cold, clear, weary.

"Who told you, Leo?"

"A friend of yours. Of his. Our dear comrade, Pavel Syerov. He dropped in on his way back from the funeral. He just wanted to congratulate me on the loss of my rival."

"Was it . . . was it a hard blow to you, Leo?"

"It was the best piece of news I'd heard since the revolution. We shook hands and had a drink together, Comrade Syerov and I. Drank to you and your lover, and any other lovers you may have. Because, you see, that sets me free."

"Free . . . from what, Leo?"

"From a little fool who was my last hold on self-esteem! A little fool I was afraid to face, afraid to hurt! Really, you know, it's funny. You and your Communist hero. I thought he had lied, making a great sacrifice by saving me for you. And he was just tired of you, he probably wanted to get you off his hands, for some other whore. So much for the sublime in the human race."

"Leo, we don't have to discuss him, do we?"

"Still love him?"

"That doesn't make any difference to you—now—does it?"

"None. None whatever. I won't even ask whether you had ever loved me. That, too, doesn't make any difference. I'd rather think you hadn't. That will make it easier for the future."

"The future, Leo?"

"Well, what did you plan it to be?"

"I . . ."

"Oh, I know! Get a respectable Soviet job and rot over a Primus and a ration card, and keep holy something in your fool imagination—your spirit or soul or honor—something that never existed, that shouldn't exist, that is the worst of all curses if it ever did exist! Well, I'm through with it. If it's murder—well—I don't see any blood. But I'm going to have champagne, and white bread, and silk shirts, and limousines, and no thoughts of any kind, and long live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!"

"Leo . . . what . . . are you going to do?"

"I'm going away."

"Where?"

"Sit down."

He sat down at the table. His one hand lay in the circle of light under the lamp, and she noticed how still and white it was, with a net of blue veins that did not seem alive. She stood, watching it, until one finger moved. Then she sat down. Her face was expressionless. Her eyes were a little wide. He noticed her lashes—little needles of shadow on her cheeks—and the lashes were dry.

"Citizen Morozov," said Leo, "has left town."

"Well?"

"He's left Tonia—he wants no connections that could be investigated. But he's left her a nice little sum of money—oh, quite nice. She's going for a rest and vacation in the Caucasus.

She has asked me to go with her. I've accepted the job. Leo Kovalensky, the great gigolo of the U.S.S.R.!"

"Leo!"

She stood before him—and he saw terror in her eyes, such naked, raw terror that he opened his mouth, but could not laugh.

"Leo . . . not that!"

"She's an old bitch. I know. I like it better that way. She has the money and she wants me. Just a business deal."

"Leo . . . you . . . like a . . ."

"Don't bother about the names. You can't think of any as good as the ones I've thought of myself."

He noticed that the folds of her dress were shivering and that her hands were flung back unnaturally, as if leaning on space, and he asked, rising: "You're not going to be fool enough to faint, are you?"

She said, drawing her shoulders together: "No, of course not. . . . Sit down. . . . I'm all right. . . ."

She sat on the edge of the table, her hands clutching it tightly, and she looked at him. His eyes were dead and she turned away, for she felt that those eyes should be closed. She whispered: "Leo . . . if you had been killed in the G.P.U. . . . or if you had sold yourself to some magnificent woman, a foreigner, young and fresh and . . ."

"I wouldn't sell myself to a magnificent woman, young and fresh. I couldn't. Not yet. In a year—I probably will."

He rose and looked at her and laughed softly, indifferently: "Really, you know, don't you think it's not for you to express any depths of moral indignation? And since we both are what we are, would you mind telling me just why you kept me on while you had him? Just liked to sleep with me, like all the other females? Or was it my money and his position?"

Then she rose, and stood very straight, very still, and asked: "Leo, when did you tell her that you'd go with her?"

"Three days ago."

"Before you knew anything about Andrei and me?"

"Yes."

"While you still thought that I loved you?"

"Yes."

"And that made no difference to you?"

"No."

"If Syerov had not come here today, you'd still go with her?"

"Yes. Only then I'd have to face the problem of telling you."

He spared me that. That's why I was glad to hear it. Now we can say good-bye without any unnecessary scenes."

"Leo . . . please listen carefully . . . it's very important . . . please do me a last favor and answer this one question honestly, to the best of your knowledge: if you were to learn suddenly—it doesn't matter how—but if you were to learn that I love you, that I've always loved you, that I've been loyal to you all these years—would you still go with her?"

"Yes."

"And . . . if you *had* to stay with me? If you learned something that . . . that bound you to stay and . . . and to struggle on—would you try it once more?"

"If I were bound to—well, who knows? I might do what your other lover did. That's also a solution."

"I see."

"And why do you ask that? What is there to bind me?"

She looked straight at him, her face raised to his, and her hair fell back off a very white forehead, and only her lips moved as she answered with the greatest calm of her life: "Nothing, Leo."

He sat down again and clasped his hands and stretched them out, shrugging: "Well, that's that. Really, I still think you're wonderful. I was afraid of hysterics and a lot of noise. It's ended as it should have ended. . . . I'm leaving in three days. Until then—I can move out of here, if you want me to."

"No. I'd rather go. Tonight."

"Why tonight?"

"I'd rather. I can share Lydia's room, for a while."

"I haven't much money left, but what there is, I want you to . . ."

"No."

"But . . ."

"Please, don't. I'll take my clothes. That's all I need."

She was packing a suitcase, her back turned to him, when he asked suddenly: "Aren't you going to say anything? Have you nothing to say?"

She turned and looked at him calmly, and answered: "Only this, Leo: it was I against a hundred and fifty million people. I lost."

When she was ready to go, he rose and asked suddenly, involuntarily: "Kira . . . you loved me, once, didn't you?"

She answered: "When a person dies, one does not stop loving him, does one?"

"Do you mean, Tamara?"

"Does it make any difference, Leo?"
 "No. May I help you to carry the suitcase downstairs?"
 "No, thank you. It's not heavy. Good-bye, Leo."
 He took her hand, and his face moved toward hers, but she
 shook her head, and he said only: "Good-bye, Kira."

She walked out into the street, leaning slightly to her left,
 her right arm pulled down by the weight of the suitcase. A
 frozen fog hung like cotton over the street, and a lamp post
 made a sickly, yellow blot spilled in the fog. She straightened
 her shoulders and walked slowly, and the white earth creaked
 under her feet, and the line of her chin was parallel with the
 earth, and the line of her glance parallel with her chin.
 To her family, three silent, startled faces, Kira explained
 quietly and Galina Petrovna gasped: "But what happened
 to . . ."

"Nothing. We're just tired of each other."

"My poor, dear child! I . . ."

"Please don't worry about me, Mother. If you'll forgive
 me the inconvenience, Lydia, it will be only for a little while.
 I couldn't have found another room for just a few weeks."

"Why certainly! Why, I'll be only too glad to have you, Kira,
 after all you've done for us. But why for a few weeks? Where
 are you going after that?"

She answered, and her voice had the intensity of a maniac's
 "Abroad."

*

On the following morning, Citizen Kira Argounova filed a
 application for a foreign passport. She had several weeks
 wait for an answer.

Galina Petrovna moaned: "It's insanity, Kira! Sheer
 sanity! In the first place, they won't give it to you. You have
 no reasons to show why you want to go abroad, and you have
 your father's social past and all. . . . And even if you do
 the passport—then what? No foreign country will admit
 Russian and I can't say that I blame them. And if they admit
 you—what are you going to do? Have you thought of that?"

"No," said Kira.

"You have no money. You have no profession. How
 you going to live?"

"I don't know."

"What will happen to you?"

"I don't care."

"But why are you doing it?"

"I want to get out."

"But you'll be all alone, lost in a wide world, with not a . . ."

"I want to get out."

". . . with not a single friend to help you, with no aim, no future, no . . ."

"I want to get out."

On the evening of his departure, Leo came to say good-bye. Lydia left them alone in her room.

Leo said: "I couldn't go, Kira, after parting as we did. I wanted to say good-bye and . . . Unless you'd rather . . ."

She said: "No. I'm glad you came."

"I wanted to apologize for some of the things I said to you. I had no right to say them. It's not up to me to blame you. Will you forgive me?"

"It's all right, Leo. I have nothing to forgive."

"I wanted to tell you that . . . that . . . Well, no, there's nothing to tell you. Only that . . . we have a great deal to . . . remember, haven't we?"

"Yes, Leo."

"You'll be better off without me."

"Don't worry about me, Leo."

"I'll be back in Petrograd. We'll meet again. We'll meet when years have passed, and years make such a difference, don't they?"

"Yes, Leo."

"Then we won't have to be so serious any more. It will be strange to look back, won't it? We'll meet again, Kira. I'll be back."

"If you're still alive—and if you don't forget."

It was as if she had kicked a dead animal in the road and saw it jerking in a last convulsion. He whispered: "Kira . . . don't . . ."

But she knew it was only a last convulsion and she said: "I won't."

He kissed her and her lips were soft and tender and yielding to his. Then he went.

*

She had several weeks to wait.

In the evenings, Alexander Dimitrievitch came home from work and shook snow off his galoshes in the lobby, and wiped them carefully with a special rag, for the galoshes were new and expensive.

After dinner, when he had no meeting to attend, he sat in

a corner with an unpainted wooden screen frame and worked patiently, pasting match box labels on the frame. He collected the labels and guarded them jealously in a locked box. At night, he spread them cautiously on the table, and moved them slowly into patterns, trying out color combinations. He had a whole panel completed, and he muttered, squinting at it appraisingly: "It's a beauty. A beauty. I bet no one in Petrograd has anything like it. What do you think, Kira, shall I use two yellow ones and a green one in this corner, or just three yellows?"

She answered quietly: "The green one will be nice, Father."

Galina Petrovna thundered in, at night, and flung a heavy brief case on a chair in the lobby. She had had a telephone installed, and she tore the receiver off the hook and spoke hurriedly, still removing her gloves, unbuttoning her coat. "Comrade Fedorov? . . . Comrade Argounova speaking. I have an idea for that number in the Living Newspaper, for our next Club show. . . . Now when we present Lord Chamberlain crushing the British Proletariat, we'll have one of the pupils, a good husky one, wearing a red blouse, lie down on the floor and we'll put a table on him—oh, just the front leg—and we'll have the fat one, playing Lord Chamberlain, in a high silk hat, sit at the table and eat steak. . . . Oh, it doesn't have to be a real steak, just papier-mâché. . . ."

Galina Petrovna ate her dinner hurriedly, reading the evening paper. She jumped up, looking at the clock, before she had finished, dabbed a smear of powder on her nose and, seizing her brief case, rushed out again to a Council meeting. On the rare evenings when she stayed at home, she spread books and newspaper clippings over the dining-room table and sat writing a thesis for her Marxist Club. She asked, raising her head, blinking absent-mindedly: "Kira, do you happen to know, the Paris Commune, what year was that?"

"Eighteen seventy-one, Mother," Kira answered quietly.

Lydia worked at night. In the daytime, she practiced the "Internationale" and "You fell as a victim" and the Red Cavalry song on her old grand piano that had not been tuned for over a year. When she was asked to play the old classics she loved, she refused flatly, her mouth set in a thin, foolish, stubborn line. But once in a while, she sat down at the piano suddenly and played for hours, fiercely, violently, without stopping between pieces; she played Chopin and Bach and Tchaikovsky, and when her fingers were numb she cried, sobbing aloud in broken hiccoughs, senselessly, monotonously.

like a child. Galina Petrovna paid no attention to it, saying: "Just another one of Lydia's fits."

Kira was lying on her mattress on the floor, when Lydia came home from work. Lydia took a long time to undress and a longer time to whisper endless prayers before the icons in her corner. Some evenings, she came over to Kira and sat down on the mattress, and shivering in the darkness, in her long white nightgown, her hair falling in a thick braid down her back, whispered confidentially, a ray of the street lamp beyond the window falling on her tired face with swollen eyes and dry little wrinkles in the corners of the mouth, on her dry, knotty hands that did not look young any longer: "I had a vision again, Kira, a call from above. Truly, a prophetic vision, and the voice told me that salvation shall not be long in coming. It is the end of the world and the reign of the Anti-Christ. But Judgment Day is approaching. I know. It has been revealed to me."

She whispered feverishly, she expected nothing but a peal of laughter from her sister, she was not looking at Kira, she was not certain whether Kira heard it; but she had to talk and she had to think that some human ears were listening.

"There is an old man, Kira, God's wanderer. I've been to see him. Please don't mention this to anyone, or they'll take me from the Club. He is the Chosen One of the Lord and he knows. He says it has been predicted in the Scriptures. We are punished for our sins, as Sodom and Gomorrah were punished. But hardships and sorrows are only a trial for the soul of the righteous. Only through suffering and long-lasting patience shall we become worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven."

Kira said quietly: "I won't tell anyone, Lydia. And now you'd better go to bed, because you're tired and it's so cold here."

In the daytime, Kira led excursions through the Museum of the Revolution. In the evening, she sat in the dining room and read old books. She spoke seldom. When anyone addressed her, she answered evenly, quietly. Her voice seemed fixed on a single note. Galina Petrovna wished, unconsciously, to see her angry, at least once; she did not see it. One evening when Lydia dropped a vase in the silence of the dining room and it broke with a crash, and Galina Petrovna jumped up with a startled little scream, and Alexander Dimitrievich shuddered, blinking—Kira raised her head slowly, as if nothing had happened.

But there was a flicker of life in her eyes when, on her way

home from the Excursion Center, she stopped at the window of a foreign book store on Liteiny, and stood looking thoughtfully at the bright covers with gay, broken, foreign letters, with chorus girls kicking long, glistening legs, with columns and searchlights and long, black automobiles. There was a jerk of life in her fingers when, every evening, as methodically as a bookkeeper, with a dull little stub of a pencil, she crossed another date off an old calendar on the wall over her mattress.

*

The foreign passport was refused.

Kira received the news with a quiet indifference that frightened Galina Petrovna, who would have preferred a stormy outbreak.

"Listen, Kira," said Galina Petrovna vehemently, slamming the door of her room to be left alone with her daughter, "let's talk sense. If you have any insane ideas of . . . of . . . Now, I want you to know that I won't permit it. After all, you're my daughter. I have some say in the matter. You know what it means, if you attempt . . . if you even dare to think of leaving the country illegally."

"I've never mentioned that," said Kira.

"No, you haven't. But I know you. I know what you're thinking. I know how far your foolish recklessness can . . . Listen, it's a hundred to one that you don't get out. And you'll be lucky if you're just shot at the border. It will be worse if you're caught and brought back. And if you're lucky enough to draw the one chance and slip out, it's a hundred to one that you'll die in a blizzard in those forests around the border."

"Mother, why discuss it?"

"Listen, I'll keep you here if I have to chain you. After all, one can be allowed to be crazy just so far. What are you after? What's wrong with this country? We don't have any luxuries, that's true, but you won't get any over there, either. A chambermaid is all you can hope to be, there, if you're lucky. This is the country for young people. I know your crazy stubbornness, but you'll get over it. Look at me. I've adapted myself, at my age, and, really, I can't say that I'm unhappy. You're only a pup and you can't make decisions to ruin your whole life before you've even started it. You'll outgrow your foolish notions. There is a chance for everyone in this new country of ours."

"Mother, I'm not arguing, am I? So let's drop the subject."

Kira returned home later than usual from her excursions. There were people she had to see in dark side streets, slipping furtively up dark stairs through unlighted doorways. There were bills to be slipped into stealthy hands and whispers to be heard from lips close to her ear. It would cost more than she could ever save to be smuggled out on a boat, she learned, and it would be more dangerous. She had a better chance if she tried it alone, on foot, across the Latvian border. She would need white clothes. People had done it, dressed all in white, crawling through the snow in the winter darkness. She sold her watch and paid for the name of the station and the village, and for a square inch of tissue paper with the map of the place where a crossing was possible. She sold the fur coat Leo had given her and paid for a forged permit to travel.

She sold her cigarette lighter, her silk stockings, her French perfume. She sold all her new shoes and her dresses. Vava Milovskaia came to buy the dresses. Vava waddled in, shuffling heavily in wornout felt boots. Vava's dress had a greasy patch across the chest, and her matted hair looked uncombed. Her face was puffed, a coarse white powder had dried in patches on her nose, and her eyes were encircled in heavy blue bags. When she took off her clothes, slowly, awkwardly, to try on the dresses, Lydia noticed the swelling at her once slender waistline.

"Vava, darling! What, already?" Lydia gasped.

"Yes," said Vava indifferently, "I'm going to have a baby."

"Oh, darling! Oh, congratulations!" Lydia clasped her hands.

"Yes," said Vava, "I'm going to have a baby. I have to be careful about eating and I take a walk every day. When it's born, we're going to register it with the Pioneers."

"Oh, no, Vava!"

"Oh, why not? Why not? It has to have a chance, doesn't it? It has to go to school, and to the University, maybe. What do you want me to do? Bring it up as an outcast? . . . Oh, what's the difference? Who knows who's right? . . . I don't know any more. I don't care."

"But, Vava, *your* child!"

"Lydia, what's the use? . . . I'll get a job after it's born, I'll have to. Kolya is working. It will be the child of Soviet employees. Then, later, maybe they'll admit in into the Communist Union of Youth. . . . Kira, that black velvet dress—it's so lovely. It looks almost . . . almost foreign. I know it's too tight for me now . . . but afterwards . . . maybe I'll get my

figure back. They say you do. . . . Of course, you know, Kolya isn't making very much, and I don't want to take anything from father, and . . . But father gave me a present for my birthday, fifty rubles, and I think I should . . . I could never buy anything like it anywhere."

She bought the velvet dress and two others.

To Galina Petrovna, Kira had explained: "I don't need those dresses. I don't go anywhere. And I don't like to keep them."

"Memories?" Galina Petrovna had asked.

"Yes," Kira had said. "Memories."

She did not have much money after everything was sold. She knew that she would need every ruble. She could not buy a white coat. But she had the white bear rug that she had bought from Vasili Ivanovitch long ago. She took it secretly to a tailor and ordered it made into a coat. The coat came out as a short jacket that did not reach down to her knees. She would need a white dress. She could not buy one. But she still had Galina Petrovna's white lace wedding gown. When she was alone at home, she took her old felt boots into the kitchen and painted them white with lime. She bought a pair of white mittens and a white woolen scarf. She bought a ticket to a town far out of the way, far from the Latvian border.

When everything was ready, she sewed her little roll of money into the lining of the white fur jacket. She would need it there—if she crossed the border.

On a gray winter afternoon, she left the house when no one was at home. She did not say good-bye. She left no letter. She walked down the stairs and out into the street as if she were going to the corner store. She wore an old coat with a matted fur collar. She carried a small suitcase. The suitcase contained a white fur jacket, a wedding gown, a pair of boots, a pair of mittens, a scarf.

She walked to the station. A brownish mist hung over the roof tops, and men walked, bent to the wind, huddled, their hands in their armpits. A white frost glazed the posters, and the bronze cupolas of churches were dimmed in a silvery gray. The wind whirled little coils in the snow, and kerosene lamps stood in store windows, melting streaks on the frozen white panes.

"Kira," a voice called softly on a corner.

She turned. It was Vasili Ivanovitch. He stood under a lamp post, hunched, the collar of his old coat raised to his red ears,

an old scarf twisted around his neck, two leather straps slung over his shoulders, holding a tray of saccharine tubes.

"Good evening, Uncle Vasili."

"Where are you going, Kira, with that suitcase?"

"How have you been, Uncle Vasili?"

"I'm all right, child. It may seem a strange business to find me in, I know, but it's all right. Really, it's not as bad as it looks. I don't mind it at all. Why don't you come to see us, sometimes, Kira?"

"I . . ."

"It's not a grand place, ours, and there's another family in the same room, but we're getting along. Acia will be glad to see you. We don't have many visitors. Acia is a nice child."

"Yes, Uncle Vasili."

"It's such a joy to watch her growing, day by day. She's getting better at school, too. I help her with her lessons. I don't mind standing here all day, because then I go home, and there she is. Everything isn't lost, yet. I still have Acia's future before me. Acia is a bright child. She'll go far."

"Yes, Uncle Vasili."

"I read the papers, too, when I have time. There's a lot going on in the world. One can wait, if one has faith and patience."

"Uncle Vasili . . . I'll tell them . . . over there . . . where I'm going . . . I'll tell them about everything . . . it's like an S.O.S. . . . And maybe . . . someone . . . somewhere . . . will understand. . . ."

"Child, where are you going?"

"Will you sell me a tube of saccharine, Uncle Vasili?"

"Why, no, I won't sell it to you. Take it, child, if you need it."

"Certainly not. I was going to buy it anyway from someone else," she lied. "Don't you want me for a customer? It may bring you luck."

"All right, child."

"I'll take this nice big one with the big crystals. Here you are."

She slipped the coin into his hand and the tube of saccharine into her pocket.

"Well, good-bye, Uncle Vasili."

"Good-bye, Kira."

She walked away without looking back. She walked through the dusk, through gray and white streets, under

ners bending down from old walls, grayish banners that had been red. She walked through a wide square where the tramway lights twinkled, springing out of the mist. She walked up the frozen steps of the station, without looking back.

XVII

The train wheels knocked as if an iron chain were jerked twice, then rumbled dully, clicking, then gave two sharp broken jerks again. The wheels tapped like an iron clock ticking swiftly, knocking off seconds and minutes and miles.

Kira Argounova sat on a wooden bench by the window. She had her suitcase on her lap and held it with both hands, her fingers spread wide apart. Her head leaned back against the wooden seat and trembled in a thin little shudder, like the dusty glass pane. Her lids drooped heavily over her eyes fixed on the window. She did not close her eyes. She sat for hours without moving, and her muscles did not feel the immobility, or she did not feel her muscles any longer.

Beyond the window, nothing moved in the endless stretches of snow but black smears of telegraph poles, as if the train were suspended, stationary, between two slices of white and gray, and the wheels shrieked as if grating in a void. Once in a while, a white blot on a white desert, a blot with black edges shaped as fir branches, sprang up suddenly beyond the window and whirled like lightning across the pane.

When she remembered that she had not eaten for a long time, dimly uncertain whether it was hours or days, dimly conscious that she had to eat, even though she had forgotten hunger, she broke a chunk off a stale loaf of bread, which she had bought at the station, and chewed it slowly, with effort, her jaws moving monotonously, like a machine.

Around her, men left the car, when the train stopped at stations, and came back with steaming tea kettles. Once, someone put a cup into her hand, and she drank, the hot tin edge pressed to her lips.

Telegraph wires raced the train, crossing and parting and crossing again, thin black threads flying faster, faster than the shuddering car could follow.

a dark little platform of rotted wooden planks, the last stop before the train's terminal, before the border town.

It was getting dark. Brown wheel-tracks in the snow led far away into a glowing red patch. A few sleepy soldiers on the platform paid no attention to her. A large wicker hamper rattled as husky fists lowered it to the ground from a baggage car. At the station door, someone begged loudly for hot water. Lights twinkled in the car windows.

She walked away, clutching her suitcase, following the wheel tracks in the snow.

She walked, a slender black figure, leaning faintly backward, alone in a vast field rusty in the sunset.

It was dark when she saw the village houses ahead and yellow dots of candles in windows low over the ground. She knocked at a door. A man opened it; his hair and beard were a bushy blond tangle from which two bright eyes peered inquisitively. She slipped a bill into his hand and tried to explain as fast as she could, in a choked whisper. She did not have to explain much. Those in the house knew and understood.

Behind a low wooden partition, her feet in the straw where two pigs slept huddled together, she changed her clothes, while those in the room sat around a table, as if she were not present, five blond heads, one of them in a blue kerchief. Wooden spoons knocked in the wooden bowls on the table, and the sound of another spoon came from the shelf of a brick stove in the corner, where a gray head bent, sighing, over a wooden bowl. A candle stood on the table, and three little red tongues flickered before a bronze triangle of ikons in a corner, little glimmers of red in the bronze halos.

She put on the white boots and took off her dress; her naked arms shuddered a little, even though the room was hot and stuffy. She put on the white wedding gown, and its long train rustled in the straw, and a pig opened one slit of an eye. She lifted the train and pinned it carefully to her waistline, with big safety-pins. She wound the white scarf tightly about her hair, and put on the white fur jacket. She felt cautiously the little lump in the lining over her left breast, where she had sewn the bills; it was the last and only weapon she would need.

When she approached the table, the blond giant said, his voice expressionless: "Better wait for an hour or so, till the moon sets. The clouds ain't so steady."

He moved, making room for her on the bench, pointing to it silently, imperatively. She raised the lace dress, stepped over the bench and sat down. She took off the jacket and held

it over her arm, pressed tightly to her body. Two pairs of feminine eyes stared at her high lace collar, and the girl in the blue kerchief whispered something to the older woman. Her eyes averted, incredulous.

Silently, the man put a steaming wooden bowl before the guest.

"No, thank you," she said. "I'm not hungry."

"Eat," he ordered. "You'll need it."

She ate obediently a thick cabbage soup that smelled of hound.

The man said suddenly in the silence, without looking at her: "It's pretty near a whole night's walk."

She nodded.

"Pretty young," said the woman across the table, shaking her head, and sighed.

When she was ready to go, the man opened the door to a cold wind whining over an empty darkness, and muttered in his blond beard: "Walk as long as you can. When you see a guard—crawl."

"Thank you," she said, as the door closed.

*

Snow rose to her knees, and each step was like a fall forward, and she held her skirt high, clutched in her fist. Around her, a blue that did not seem blue, a color that was no color, that had never existed in the world she had known, stretched without end; and sometimes she thought she was standing alone, very tall, very high over a flat circle, and sometimes she thought the bluish whiteness was a huge wall closing in over her head.

The sky hung low, in grayish patches, and black patches, and streaks of a blue that one could never remember in the daytime; and blots of something which was not a color and not quite a light ray, flowed from nowhere, trickling once in a while among the clouds, and she bent her head not to see it.

There were no lights ahead; she knew that the lights behind her had long since vanished, even though she did not look back. She carried nothing: she had left her suitcase and her old clothes in the village; she would need nothing—there—ahead—but the little roll in the lining of her jacket, and she touched it cautiously, once in a while.

Her knees hurt with the piercing pain of stretched sinews, as if she were climbing a long stairway. She watched the pain, a little curiously, like an outsider. Scalding needles pierced

ner Max nor Jen had turned up for work at nine o'clock. Though the hours of that morning an under-current of speculation eddied back and forth. In the office where Max worked, two typists exchanged ideas hurriedly. "I tell you, they got married." "Yeh, don't you know they got a three-day law in California?"

"But maybe they got married in Carson or Verdi—'fore they ever left Nevada." "I'll bet they picked up a couple of swell jobs somewhere, and are just givin' us the ha-ha." In the restaurant where Jen worked, the proprietress was in the cashier's booth. "Where's Jen?" said a regular customer.

"Oh, she's off for a few days," bluffed the proprietress. Jen's roommate who worked at the candy counter was worried, and sniveled secretly into her handkerchief. She was glad she remembered the name of Jen's sister in San Francisco. At nine o'clock not twenty-five people had known anything. By noon the knowledge had spread to a hundred. Through the lunch hour, as people mingled and relaxed and fell into talk, the story radiated out until possibly a thousand people knew some vague version, and the diverging chains of gossip began to meet.

"You know a guy named Arnim? Well, anyway, he's disappeared—him and a girl." "Oh, him? Sure, I heard about him. Only, what I heard was . . ."

Neither Max nor Jen had any family in Reno. People liked to talk, but nobody wanted to stick his finger into what might be after all just some other person's very private business—live and let live. In the restaurant the waitresses began to whisper together, and Jen's roommate felt they were looking at her. She broke down openly into a sudden fit of crying, and the proprietress just about snapped the hump off a couple of girls.

But when hundreds of people know something, the must by the law of averages soon reach a person who act instead of talk. This happened when someone passed time of day with a policeman named McNenery.

"D'ya hear about this Arnim fellow?"

The citizen who passed on this information leaned prevalent romantic theory that the missing pair (like tram and Iseult having drunken of the potion) had stared looked into each other's eyes, and counted the words

lost for love. But fifteen years on the force had destroyed McNenery's illusions, and left him correspondingly clear-headed. In his world people did not endanger good jobs to go to bed, not when they could keep the jobs and go to bed anyway.

McNenery looked at the sky, which was thickly overcast. There were several inches of snow on the streets, and snow was falling thinly. McNenery suddenly talked about the weather.

"She's raining a lot harder than this on the other side, and snowing plenty on the Hump. The mountains squeeze all the juice out of the storm before it ever gets to Nevada. It's a long road back from Frisco."

Then he called headquarters to find out whether anything had come in from the California Highway Patrol. There was nothing. He made no report to Headquarters, but went around to the restaurant and dropped in, as if about nothing of importance. But the entrance of his uniform seemed to make electrical connections all over the establishment; even the dish-washers came peering out. McNenery talked with the proprietress, who called over Jen's roommate, who again went into tears.

"I think you ought to call that sister in San Francisco," said McNenery gently. "Tell her something—you and Jen had a date, and you wanted to check up when she'd be back."

The roommate hesitated.

"I'll pay the tolls," snapped the proprietress, who saw the restaurant demoralized until the matter was settled.

The roommate went to the booth, and called long distance.

A light glowed on the Reno long-distance board. The operator plugged one of the San Francisco lines. More quickly than the mind of man conceives, the impulses ran along two hundred miles of circuit—through wires over the pass loaded to the breaking point with snow, through wires in the Valley dripping with rain, through the cables beneath the Bay. A light glowed on the great San Francisco board; an operator plugged the local exchange, and at that board another operator plugged the proper number. A bell rang in the house of Jen's sister.

Dot was washing the lunch dishes. "Drat it!" she said mildly, and went to the phone.

Jen's roommate came from the telephone booth weeping hysterically. Everybody crowded around—patrons who were still eating their lunches, even the dish-washers.

"They left her house Sunday night, and were going to

drive right straight here . . . She just went right off the handle because I hadn't called her sooner . . . She's calling the police right now."

5

The old coyote who ranged the summit of Donner Pass found the storm scarcely even an inconvenience. At the first warnings he had withdrawn to a rocky ledge on the lee side of Donner Peak. In a deep crevice he was comfortably protected from wind and snow; his winter coat was thick and warm; from the innermost recesses of the rocks a little ground water dripped continually and he could lick up what he wanted before it froze. He spent forty-eight hours, mostly in sleeping. Then he was hungry.

He floundered heavily in the deep snow, but had little difficulty in working down the steep face of the mountain-side. When he came to the railroad track, he smelled the wind cautiously. But he was used to the works of man, and like a trout inhabiting an irrigation ditch, he made use of them for his own ends. He trotted along the cleared track until he came to a point near a thick stand of fir. He hunted patiently and methodically, and soon was crunching the bones of a big rabbit. His meal finished, he needed water.

Though it was broad daylight, the thickly flying snow gave him cover, and he moved boldly. He came to the highway, trotted along it easily for a short distance, and then scrambled rapidly over the snow-wall as he heard a car approaching.

Close under the cliffs below the point at which the highway crossed the summit, he paused and sniffed suspiciously. The air was carrying a smell which he did not expect at this place. The smell was a mingled one. Some of the suggestions were alarming. Others were pleasant, as of meat and eating. He sniffed about in the snow for a few moments, and then went on. The association of the odors and the place was recorded in his excellent memory for possible future investigation.

6

During ten years of work for the telephone company Rick had climbed more poles than anybody could count in a blue moon. He had climbed them by day and by night, in rain, in snow, in sleet, in fog so thick that from the ground you could hardly see the cross-arms; he had climbed them in blazing summer suns which made your head swim, in September northers which filled your eyes with dust, in the smoke of forest fires which half-strangled you. He felt that he knew about climbing poles, anywhere, anytime. Climbing a pole

was no more to him than going upstairs was to other people.

On this day he kept at it, working alone. Where the wires were farther from the highway, linemen had to work in pairs for safety, but in this section the lead was everywhere close to the highway, usually within sight of it. Rick was glad today that he could work alone; it gave him more chance to think of the girl.

Lower down in the foothills the snow was sticky, and several crews were busy on the local lines. But on the transcontinental there had been only sniping trouble—here a wire, there a wire.

When he saw this particular break, Rick halted the truck and parked it as usual. The snow-wall was high and clean-cut, for recently a rotary plow had passed by. Down around the first curve he could see it throwing its curve of snow out among the pine trees.

There was a hundred-yard stretch of rough going to the pole. When he got there, he saw that the broken wire was from the lowest cross-arm, and would be an easy job. He was glad, for he was thinking of that girl—maybe the next time he got a chance he would telephone her for a date, and the sooner he fixed this wire the sooner he could do it.

The pole stood in a rather open spot in the forest, but near it was a young lodge-pole pine about thirty feet tall and bending over heavily with snow. If it had been bigger, the maintenance-men would have felled it; but they had not bothered with this tree, for even though it should be blown down or bend clear over because of the snow-load, it would be too short to touch the wires and too small to damage a pole.

Rick finished his work on the ground, and made ready to ascend. He stuck his ski-poles into the snow. As he did so, a thought of the girl came to his mind; he did not thrust one of the poles quite hard enough; it leaned over so that its top touched against the top of the other.

In a sudden flurry the snow came more thickly in great flakes. The near-by tree loaded more heavily and bent over still farther. The wind blew it back and forth a little, but from some trick of its own growth it leaned into the wind and in the direction of the telephone pole.

Rick climbed up to the cross-arm, snapped on his safety-belt, and started working.

The tree, weighted beyond its strength, leaned farther and farther.

Rick worked on. Above him passed the forty wires of the Central Transcontinental. Lead—a miracle of engineering. Each of those pairs of wires could carry many voices at the same time, and yet unscramble them perfectly at the end.

coming voices put through deals and shouted orders. Anxious voices inquired about the operation or the accident; triumphant voices called for congratulations, and sorrowful voices passed into sobs.

To Rick upon the pole, the wire was only something to be mended. He attached his little block-and-tackle. The tree leaned still lower, almost brushing the pole.

Voices coursed along the wires in English of a half dozen different intonations, in Dutch, Japanese, German, Spanish, and Greek. An Assistant Secretary of State was talking to the Minister of Thailand. Teletype circuits were being operated; cable messages were going through in code; a symphony orchestra was playing for a radio network.

Rick was just attaching the wire to the insulator. Below him, the tip of the tree settled noiselessly against the pole.

The Minister of Thailand was taken with a fit of coughing, and two faithful wires just above Rick's head transmitted half way around the world, the senseless spasms of his midriff equally as well as they had his keenest comments upon the international situation.

Rick finished his work, and rested a moment. He shook the snow off his coat, and brushed it from his eyebrows. He was warm from his work, and unbuttoned his coat. He did not glance down the pole, and see that the tip of the tree rested tightly against it a few feet below him. The thought of the girl with blue eyes and dark-tanned face was in his mind; felt in some way touched with nobility; for the moment was again absent-minded. Upon the pole on the mountain side with the falling snow thick about him in all directions beneath the wires which reached to all corners of the world he was wholly alone.

He unsnapped his safety-belt and started down, his blowing loosely about him. At its second stroke the climbing-iron on his right foot pierced deceptively the top twig of the leaning tree, and through it barely nicked the pole itself. Rick shifted his weight to that leg, the climbing-iron loose; and he fell sprawling through the air.

He whirled round as he fell, his coat flew open; without protection but his shirt and underwear he lit squarely in the middle of his body upon the tops of his two shoulders. One pole might have given way, or been pushed into the snow, but the two poles together thrust stiffly against his diaphragm, just below his heart.

The tree, jarred by his fall, released its load and stood upright. Snow scattered upon Rick where he lay. In a moment he came to, without realizing that he had been unconscious. "Must have knocked the wind out of me."

he thought, afraid to admit anything worse. The great numbness around the base of his chest frightened him.

Rick was mountain-bred, a fighter. He managed to get himself from the hole which he had made when he fell; he wormed along inch by inch to his skis, but when he reached them, he could not get to his feet and put them on. He decided to lie upon them and use them as a sled. Before he could get himself placed, he was growing numb; he thought that he should have eaten more heavily before coming out on this job.

Overhead were passing the strains of the orchestra playing Beethoven's *Third Symphony*. "This connection is rotten," said a man in Pocatello angrily to a man in Fresno. A teletype circuit was recording an unsettled market in Chicago caused by nervousness as to the crop-effect of the cold wave which was sweeping the wheat belt.

Rick slid down the first little slope. "It's easy!" he thought for one joyous moment. Then he plunged head-on into the tangle of a cedar tree. He found himself so stiff that he could not possibly turn himself around and crawl out. He began doggedly to back himself out feet first, squirming, inch by inch. Then he realized that his circulation was not working as it should; he thought fearfully that there must be a great bruise close to his heart; he was cold. The pain of the squirming motion was intense. Nevertheless he worked himself back until his head was free, and then he felt himself growing dizzy and faint. He realized that he must rest for a minute. It was an extreme pleasure to stop struggling and lie still.

Down on the highway the little green truck was already so plastered with snow that a man driving along the highway could hardly distinguish it from a drift.

7

On the rocky ledge the rotting bole of the cedar tree was settling by minute gradations, but steadily. The direction of the storm was such that snow piled up on top of the bole, and was swept out from beneath it. This distribution increased the tendency toward rotation instead of mere settling, as the rotten fibers yielded under increasing weight. By infinitesimal fractions of an inch the center of gravity moved forward.

Blue Boy, the big boar, did not mind the rain. His fat kept him warm, and as a natural wallower in swamps and marshes he was adjusted to water. As the ground softened, he rooted after what he could find. This occupation was chiefly a pastime, for there were still plenty of acorns lying about. As

he worked back and forth along the steep hillside, he saw with incurious eyes the trains passing along the double-tracked railroad below him—heavy freights, swiftly moving expresses, the shiny streamliner. When the downpour became uncomfortably heavy and the wind was high, Blue Boy withdrew for shelter to the thick covert of a low-growing live-oak.

The bullet which "Dirty Ed" had shot at the switch-box had pierced a little hole in the metal, pinged against the other wall, and then fallen to rest on the bottom of the box. The electrical connections had suffered no damage.

The switch-box controlled the power for Underpass 342-2 by which U. S. Highway 101 went beneath a railroad. The underpass was in flat country close to the Bay, and could not drain by natural flow. During heavy rains much water ran down the slope of the highway on either side, and collected in a sump at the bottom of the underpass. In the sump was a float, when the rising water had lifted this float to the proper point, switches were automatically tripped, a motor started with a whir, and a pump began to work. If the water-level rose still higher, a second pump started. One pump could keep the underpass clear of water in any ordinary rain; the second supplied an ample reserve of capacity for even the heaviest cloudburst.

The construction was similar to that used in hundreds of underpasses so situated that they could not drain by gravity. Accident, of course, was possible, as with all works of man. But the maintenance gangs inspected the working of the underpass when a storm was expected, and frequently during the storm. The results were so nearly perfect that every day thousands of drivers dipped into the slope of the underpass and steered around its curve without ever thinking that this stretch of the road was at all different from any other.

8

Station KPDS calling all cars of the State Highway Patrol. Car, driver, and passenger reported missing. License—Nevada, seven, seven, one, two, four. *Repeat*: License—Nevada, seven, seven, one, two, four. Details of description will be broadcast later. That is all. . . .

(From the *Register*)

RENO PAIR MISSING

Left Here Sunday

Evening: Fail

to Arrive.

EXTRY! EXTRY!! EXTRY!!! This is Ye Old Time Newsy, folks. . . . And now here's an item that's not so good. "Max

Arnim, 30, and Jane Stongliff, 24, both of Reno, left San Francisco on. . . ."

A million people read it in the headlines. A million heard it by news broadcasts. Amateur detectives and boys playing G-man picked up the police broadcasts.

"Say, y'see the headline there! I used to know that guy Arnim, went to high school with him. What you know about that!"

"Maybe it was that nice young couple I served coffee and doughnuts to Sunday night. I remember thinking about them at the time—had a kind of funny feeling. I didn't see the car, but maybe it was Nevada."

"Wish to hell I could remember the number of that Nevada car I serviced. It was Nevada all right, and it had some sevens. I always notice sevens."

9

The airport lights came on, and the Chief Service Officer saw the sudden long lines of reflection cast from wet asphalt and shallow puddles. He had worked through a hard day, and it was time to be laying off. The planes had been kept going, except when low ceilings and turbulence over the Siskiyoues grew too bad about midday and he cancelled the 12:30 for Seattle; the situation looked better now, and probably the seven o'clock could go north; that would be up to the dispatcher on the night shift. The planes did not have to stop for much weather, these days. Staunch and powerful, they could bore through any except the very worst fronts.

He watched the big transcontinental leave for Salt Lake City. He himself had worked out the course of the flight. The pilot would climb steadily until, when he turned in the path of the Reno beam above Blue Canyon, he would be at

gone under. Cheyenne and Omaha would be next. But as far as Salt Lake City everything was safe, and beyond that point was out of his territory and responsibility.

10

Red and green, half obscured by flying snow, the block-lights gleamed above the railroad tracks. A rotary was just starting out of the Norden sheds. When it had gained a sufficient head-start, a faster-moving flanger would follow it. The rotary would pull into a siding at Emigrant Gap, and a few minutes later the flanger would pull in behind it. This would leave the track clear of equipment and freshly plowed so that the Limited from Chicago would go through without a stop. Everything was closely timed. The Limited would have passed Norden and be halfway to the Gap before the flanger was switched off the main track.

Compared with the compact little rotaries which cleared the highway, the steam rotary was ponderous. Instead of merely an operator and a swamper, it carried a crew of nine. In the compartment just behind the rotating blades were the conductor, the operator, a brakeman, and an oiler. In the boiler-room were an engineer and a fireman. Behind the plow to push it forward was a locomotive, and in it an engineer, a fireman, and a brakeman.

The four men in the front compartment really operated the rotary, and no one envied them their jobs. The conductor spent most of his time leaning out the side-door into the storm, trying to see what was happening. The operator and the brakeman crouched uncomfortably upon a raised seat trying to see through little windows usually obscured by the snow which the plow itself cast into the air; they strained to see even whether the lights were green or red. The oiler moved about with his rags and cans, inspecting the bearings.

From the heat of the boiler just behind, the compartment was steamy and hot; oil fumes made the air heavy and sickening. But occasionally an icy jet of outside air swept through the compartment, and fine powdered snow covered the beads of sweat which stood on the men's faces. As it cut into the drifts the plow bucked and vibrated. The great wheel bearing the cutting-blades revolved at high speed; it roared and pounded. Every man in the compartment knew that he was engaged in about as dangerous work as railroading affords. With so much ice and snow on the tracks derailment was always likely. And in the event of any collision, they would be caught behind the fan and rammed back into the steam of the boiler just behind them. All in all, the compartment was about as uncomfortable a place as could be found—

heat and cold, bad air, racking vibration, dinning noise, and the threat of sudden death.

Clumsy as it was, the rotary made a good job of throwing snow. On one side a vane scooped in the wall of snow which the flangers had left standing between the two tracks. On the other side a vane bit deeply into the high ridge which the flangers had built up. After the rotary had passed, there was four feet clear along the outside of the track. But the rotary did not clean the snow from between the rails, and so a flanger had to follow before the Limited could speed through safely.

In a great parabola the spout of snow rose from the rotary, cleared the ridge of snow, and fell far across the mountain-side. Striking the telegraph wires it knocked the snow from them, and set them wildly vibrating. Striking the small pine trees it blew them into a sudden agonized tossing of branches. It tore off dead limbs and sent them flying through the air.

In the compartment the operator and the brakeman leaned forward, looking for the light which they knew must be close at hand.

"Green," said the operator.

"Green," said the brakeman, confirming.

The plow moved on.

11

The long process of soaking up was completed; the earth was satisfied. Streams ran in the gullies; the rivers were rising.

Before leaving his office at six o'clock the General checked over the situation. Snow was falling at the twenty-five-hundred-foot level and above; accordingly there would be a negligible run-off from the higher mountains. On his desk, neatly codified, were hourly reports of river depths at the gauging stations on the Sacramento and its tributaries. All of them recorded the rivers rising, but slowly. The prospect, as reported by the Weather Bureau, was for more rain.

The General walked the length of his office twice, and then dictated a brief forecast:

A general rise is developing in all streams, and with continued rain higher stages will result in the Sacramento River and its tributaries. Within the next twelve to twenty-four hours water will begin to flow over Moulton, Colusa, Tisdale, and Fremont Weirs and to pass through the lower parts of Sutter and Yolo By-passes.

On the east slope by the gates at Donner Lake, on the west slope just below Emigrant Gap, the chain warnings were posted. In front of them were burning the flares, smoky oil-flames, hard-whipped by the wind, flickering from the top of squat iron balls, like witches' fires. The wording of the sign was educational rather than mandatory:

STOP

MOTORISTS PUT ON YOUR CHAINS.
WITHOUT CHAINS YOU ENDANGER
YOUR OWN LIFE AS WELL AS OTHERS.

In spite of the signs numerous motorists drove on without heeding. "Ah, y'don't need chains," some argued. "The Highway Commission is in cahoots with the garages; they want you to stop and pay four bits to get your chains put on, and maybe have to buy the chains too." Egotists went ahead, trusting to their own presumed skill as drivers. Optimists assumed that the other fellow would get into trouble. Gamblers enjoyed taking a chance. Plain fools considered that man and his works were superior to the storm. About one car in five on this particular evening went ahead without chains.

At the Maintenance Station the day-shift was finishing dinner. Food came to the table on heaped platters—steaks, boiled potatoes, canned corn, tomatoes, and spinach, hot biscuits, coffee in gallon pots, stewed apricots and cake. After a hard day the men were tired. Their arms and body muscles were dull from long wrestling with the steering-wheels; their eyes were blood-shot and their eyelids snappy from the long effort to see through the snow-storm.

The Superintendent ate with them. He was tired too, and ready to drop into bed at the first chance. He had driven back and forth along the road that day more times than he could remember; he had jumped from the car, waded through snow, shouted orders. But most of all what wore him was the sense of a pressing-down responsibility; even as he ate, he could feel the traffic going through his own mind. Cars, trucks, and buses—hundreds of them—converged from dozens of valley roads toward the snow-clogged bottleneck which was the Pass. Just as the roads converged so did the responsibility; first upon his plows and his men, then upon the foremen, then upon the Superintendent himself. As long as he could hold the road, throwing the snow off as fast as it fell, then he was master of the situation. But if ever the road

was blocked and the traffic snarled up and the work of the plows impeded, then the drifts would build up, he might lose the road, and the process of getting it opened again might take hours or even days.

A mark of the difference between the Superintendent and his men was that the men had thrown off their heavy working-outfits and had settled in for the night; their wet clothes already steamed in the drying-room. But the Superintendent still wore his boots; while the storm lasted, he was never really off-shift.

When he finished eating, he went wearily down through the covered passage-way into the garage, wondering what would happen next. The garage was warm, and water was dripping from a snow-covered rotary which had pulled in for minor adjustments. But at the wide doorway, the wind whistled, and the Superintendent buttoned up his short coat as he stood looking out.

Darkness had fallen and the storm was thick. It looked like a bad night. A heavily pounding truck came up-grade from the west; a car with yellow lights followed it at an interval—then another car, and after some minutes another. Smoking his cigarette, the Superintendent was vaguely conscious of something not just right, but he could not yet analyze his feeling. Another car came up the grade from the west, then another—and the Superintendent's vague feeling crystallized in thought. No cars had come from the *east*!

He looked at his cigarette. It was down to the butt, and he threw it from him into the storm. Moreover, he had been standing there a little while before lighting the cigarette. In that time no car had passed from the east. But in the same time a half dozen had passed from the west and here came two more. It might be a coincidence, and also it might be a traffic-block on the eastern slope of the Pass. He called to the garage-foreman where he was going, jumped into his car, and drove out from the calm of the garage into the blinding confusion of the storm.

In spite of the constant work of the plows, little drifts of snow lay across the road; the tire-tracks of the cars which had just passed were half obliterated. Even an expert like the Superintendent could not make speed on a night like this, no matter how great the emergency. He swung around the curve of the bridge, still meeting no car from the east. Then just as he was nearing Windy Point, he came to the first of the parked cars.

They were all on the right-hand side of the road, but farther ahead there must be a block. The Superintendent pulled up behind the last car, and jumped out. If anyone, he thought, ever needed to be three or four people

that moment was it. He ran down beside the line of cars, clicking off in his mind the things to be done and the order of their doing. Save life; see what's the matter; keep it from getting worse; straighten it out; get the road open.

As he ran, he mapped out the situation. Windy Point—the road swung around a steep out-jutting of granite. On the outside of the curve a cliff fell away. And the Point was named because from some trick of topography a redoubled wind swirled about it. Elsewhere the storm might ease off, but at Windy Point there was always a blizzard; if no snow was falling, the wind picked it off the ground and blew it through the air.

Ahead on the curve the Superintendent saw the moving beam of a flashlight. "There's where the block is!" he thought. Then, just as he most wanted to rush forward, he dug his hob-nails into the snow, and turned to a car he was just passing. He pounded vigorously on the closed window-glass; he could feel the throb of the engine.

The window-glass lowered two inches and a blankly wondering pair of eyes stared out.

"Open your windows or shut off your engine," shouted the Superintendent without ceremony. "Want to suffocate to death with gas-fumes?"

He saw the look of sudden consternation come into the eyes, and then he ran on. "Idiots!" he thought, "Closing all the windows and then running the engine to keep warm!"

Now both lanes were full of halted cars pointed down hill. The reckless and over-confident drivers had tried to pass the cars ahead, and now the road was blocked solidly. The Superintendent raged within himself at the stupidity of man.

The flashlight was in the hands of a truck-driver whose big truck had slewed around, blocking both lanes. The Superintendent knew that no professional truck-driver would have got into such a jam by himself; so without pausing he climbed around the truck's bumper, and saw two cars stalled just beyond it. They were at crazy angles to the road, and one of them had a half-crushed fender. A man in a long city overcoat and a soft felt hat covered with snow was scraping away ineffectively with a jack-handle behind one of the cars, trying to put on chains.

The Superintendent grabbed him by the shoulder: "Anybody hurt here?"

The man, frightened and shaken, yielded to the voice of authority without questioning.

"Nobody hurt. That truck—"

"Never mind the truck. You ran past tire-chain warnings yourself."

But it was no time to argue. Knowing now that nobody

needed first-aid, the Superintendent scrambled back across the truck, and grabbed the truck-driver.

"Hey, Jack," he said, "I'm road-superintendent here. Take that flashlight and go back and flag all the cars coming down grade. Don't let 'em block the left-hand lane any more than it is already."

"O. K., boss."

The Superintendent was thankful again for truck-drivers; they knew there was more to driving a car than just sitting behind the wheel. Just then a big deep voice spoke out at the Superintendent's ear.

"Anything I can do, officer?"

The Superintendent overlooked being mistaken for a snow-covered highway patrolman. The man who spoke was in a city overcoat and a felt hat, much like the man who was trying to dig his car out with the jack-handle. But he was different. The Superintendent recognized his type at once. Most drivers of private cars were idiots in an emergency, but now and then one kept his head. Sometimes a man like that, wearing good clothes, would straighten out a jam on his own initiative; people would take advice from him when they wouldn't from a truck driver.

"Sure you can help," said the Superintendent. "See if those cars in the left-hand lane can back up. If they can, help 'em do it, and we'll get one lane clear above the block."

The Superintendent climbed back across the truck again, and went past the man who was still digging in the snow with the jack-handle. Below the block, things looked the same as on the upper side—cars jammed thick into both lanes—big cars and little, old and new, a jalopy with a broken window plugged with a quilt. Already windshields were plastered over, and snow was drifting between the cars. Enough headlights were still burning to throw a yellow glare over everything.

On a half-run, as fast as he could go, the Superintendent hurried along between the two files of cars. He glanced right and left as he ran. From windows lowered just a few inches he saw one pair of eyes after another staring out stupidly, looking a little perturbed but just waiting for somebody else to straighten things out. Yet as he hurried on, he met two men bending forward into the gale, plugging through the storm, ahead. The Superintendent felt a quick warmth within him; those snow-covered figures let him know that Americans weren't all soft with civilization; some of them still piled out into the gale and the snow, and marched to the front, to see if anything could be done—and do it. The blood of the frontiersmen hadn't yet gone altogether thin.

Again he had to stop to warn people about closed windows.

but the next time he stopped, it was because the door of a car was standing open. He looked in—nobody there. He thought of the two men he had met, but they would have shut their doors to keep the snow out. And there—of all things—were some gloves lying on the front seat, a woman's gloves!

He hurried to the next car, and beat on the window-glass. Another pair of stupidly wondering eyes looked out at him.

"What happened to that woman in the car ahead?" shouted the Superintendent.

"Her?" came the word from an invisible mouth below the level of the glass. "She and the old man was with her—they started t'walk down the road. She yelled in—said we was all goin' t' get buried in by the snow and froze. Just like somebody named Donner, she said. Think we'd better start walkin' out like she said?"

"God's sake, no! When did they leave?"

"Oh, maybe five minutes."

The Superintendent really ran now. Five minutes! But a hysterical woman and an old man could not move very fast. Crazy! There ought to be a law against books about the Donner Party; but he had known it to happen even when people had never heard of the Donners.

At the end of the line another car was pulling in. The Superintendent yelled through at the driver: "See a man and woman down this road, walking?"

"Yes. We wondered—"

The Superintendent opened the door without asking leave. "Slide over," he said, "and give me the wheel. You got chains on?"

"Yes."

"Don't argue then."

The Superintendent flipped the wheels to the left, and drove the front bumper into the snow-wall. He reversed, spinning the steering-wheel. He felt the back tires slip, the chains bit and held her. He flung her into low gear, steered left, just grazed the snow-wall with the bumper and was off—downgrade.

"How far away did you pass those people?"

"Gee, I don't know," said the man. "Quite a way."

"Just the other side of the big bend," said the woman who was sitting crowded against the other door.

"Thanks." It was funny; sometimes a woman had less sense about such things than a man did.

It was a fine big car; he put it into second and went around the Horseshoe as fast as he dared; and then

about twice as fast as any ordinary driver would dare. Out of his eye-corner he saw that the man beside him was scared, pea-green.

He met a car going up; it was a knife in his ribs to think that another car was going up there to add to the clutter, but he had to see to this other matter first, even if it lost him the road. In theory the Highway Patrol handled traffic and people, while he took care of the snow. But there might not be an officer within ten miles, and so he had to look after everything, all at once.

He slowed down. "Keep a look-out on the other side for those two people, will you, please?" he said to the woman. She lowered the window a little. The snow came with a blast in her face, but she kept looking. She was a good one.

The Superintendent was thinking fast. There must be a rotary working close to here. He would stop and see if the operator had seen these people walking, and they could set their radio working to bring up help. Perhaps, he kept hoping, one of the men who had enough courage to get out into the storm would also have the sense to start flagging cars and keep them from piling into the jam on the lower side.

Then he saw them—two figures scurrying awkwardly to the side of the road as the car-lights hit them. He threw on the brakes.

"I'll have to bring them into your car."

He was afraid that the woman might be hysterical, but ten minutes in the storm had taken the fight out of her. She was middle-aged, and the man must be close to sixty. They were a miserable-looking pair, plastered with snow, not too warmly dressed. The woman's gloveless hands were blue with cold already. And it was five miles down the Pass before the first house.

He bundled them into the back seat of the big car. The woman in front gave them a steamer-rug. The Superintendent climbed in again behind the wheel, and started again downgrade toward where the rotary must be working. He had saved life; now he must get his road open. He spoke quickly and quietly to the man beside him.

"Look here. Confidentially, that jam up there won't be cleared for a little while. Why don't you go down and wait at the bottom of the Pass? There's a joint there where you can keep warm and get some coffee, and our friends," he jerked his head toward the back-seat, "need some. Might save a case of pneumonia. I'll have their car brought up to the Maintenance Station, and you can drop them there."

"Sure, we'll do that," said the woman next the window

Then he saw the lights of the rotary, and stopped.

"Thanks, folks," he said to the people who owned the car, and jumped out without ever explaining who he was.

He crawled into the cab of the rotary, and gave orders fast. "Raise the plow, boys, and take me up the road as fast as you can. We're all needed."

Then he pulled the handle that elevated the aerial, and turned the current on, to warm up the tubes. The forty-five seconds they took seemed a long time tonight. Usually it was a little like playing house, to have a rotary fully equipped as a radio sending-station, registered and everything, with its own call-number. But tonight it was all serious. Twenty seconds. Half a minute.

The swamper was working his levers hard, getting augers raised; the operator was backing the plow away from the snow-wall. Forty-five seconds—and there was life in the tubes.

"KRDM-4 calling KRDO-1; KRDM-4 calling KRDO-1."

Already the operator was taking the plow upgrade as fast as he could push it. Then the Maintenance Station answered back through the storm. The Superintendent gave orders to the night-foreman.

"Halt all east-bound cars at the summit—quick! Telephone to halt all west-bound cars at the gates. Contact the Highway Patrol and tell them there's a block at Windy Point. Send two of our men down there right away to handle traffic—pull them off the day-shift if you have to. And send down a push-plow besides."

They were back at the parked cars. The Superintendent set another truck-driver with a flashlight to flag upcoming traffic. He put the operator of the rotary to work going along the line of cars assuring people that there was no danger and making certain nobody was killing himself with carbon-monoxide fumes. The swamper began clearing the left-hand lane below the block; that was comparatively easy, because you can usually back a car down-hill even in snow, but you may have a hard time backing it up-hill.

At the actual block the situation was better. The left-hand lane on the upper side had been cleared. Then the truck-drivers had got together—the way they always did—to help the truck that was in trouble. They had brought forward another truck and got a chain from it to the one which was slewed across the road. There was not much room to maneuver, and the darkness and flying snow impeded the work and slowed it down. Still, they were moving the stalled truck a foot at a time, and would have it out of the jam and back on the road in a few minutes. Working with the truck-drivers and really directing the show was the man with the

city overcoat who had volunteered to help; but he was so covered with snow that now you couldn't have told what he was wearing.

The Superintendent took charge, but there was nothing much more for him to do. Thank God for truck-drivers! It's the professionals that keep going in time of trouble. But the man in the city overcoat and the others who had come up to help were all right too.

As soon as the left-hand lane was cleared below the block, the truck-drivers and some others got their shoulders at one of the stalled cars and pushed it out of the snow-bank. It was without chains, of course, and its driver had lost his nerve; the man in the city overcoat backed it down-hill a few yards, out of the way.

The other stalled car belonged to the man who had been digging in the snow with his jack-handle; he had not managed to get even one chain on. But the trouble was that he had been trying to go forward up-grade, and all the while he could have eased his car, crumpled fender and all, down-grade without much difficulty, and got it to some easy spot where he could have got started forward again without chains. With a few directions that was exactly what he did, and once he got going he went right on, without even a thank-you, up the cleared lane above the block, and around the curve out of sight, right on for wherever he was going. He even left his jack-handle lying in the snow. The truck-drivers were so mad they could have lynched him, but the Superintendent thought it was good riddance. You could hear the car-horns from above tooting in triumph because one car had gone through, and the people knew the block must be breaking.

Next the Superintendent got rid of the east-bound cars. They were all pointed down-grade, and so had no trouble to get going. The man with the city overcoat drove away in one of them, but before he got into his car, he asked the Superintendent if there was anything more he could do.

The west-bound cars were harder. The snow had blown in around them, and they had to get started against a heavy grade. It meant a good deal of backing and wallowing and unscrambling, and the drivers were nervous because they couldn't see much. Those with chains had no real difficulty, but the others slipped about and spun their tires. All of these drivers were liable for tickets, because they had ignored the sign to put on their chains. The Superintendent told them so for a warning, but he was more interested in getting them off the road than in holding them until the Highway Patrol got there to give tickets. One by one the chainless cars were backed up until they got to a place where the

snow was hard enough for them to get started up-grade. Once they got up a little speed they could keep moving, and the summit was only a mile farther. One of the highway gang drove the car which the woman and the old man had abandoned. Finally there were only two cars left, and the Superintendent radioed the Station to telephone Truckee for a tow-car; being towed out would cost more than a ticket, and would be an equally good warning. The people in the two cars looked cold and scared, but the Superintendent wasted no sympathy on them. People like that might make him lose the road, and besides it was just luck that nobody was killed.

He ordered the push-plow and the rotary to get to work cleaning up the mess. From the look of things there had probably been a little snow-slide to begin with, and that might have blocked the first car and started all the trouble. The push-plow began shoving the snow to the outer side of the road, and scraping off the crust, which had built up into a low hummock. The plow had to rush, and when it hit the hummock it bucked and pitched; the driver gunned the motor, and then in spite of chains the big double-tired rear wheels spun and skidded. Then the driver had to back up and rush again. Sometimes the plow accomplished little, and other times the cutting edge bit in close to the top of the pavement and broke off great chunks of consolidated snow eight inches thick.

In every rush the slanting stroke of the great plow-share flung the plow off to the left, and once it "did a wind-ding" by skidding all the way round in a circle. And all the while the gale whistled around Windy Point, and the air was thick with flying snow like feathers.

In ten minutes the push-plow had got the blocked place opened up to two-lane width again; the rotary moved in and started throwing all the piled-up snow over the side.

Let down after the emergency, the Superintendent stood by his car. He was wet and cold, heavy-legged and heavy-eyed; he thought only of tumbling onto his cot. Then he noticed that one of the men who had been sent down from the Station was standing there wanting to speak to him. The fellow's name was Mart; he was a fair enough swamper, but maybe not too good in the head.

"Well, what is it, Mart? Spill it!"

"Say, Supe, I got uh idea. I just been a-figurin'. It's these here damn cars causes all the trouble. Why don't you get 'em to keep all the cars off the road? Then we can keep it nice and clean as anything all winter."

The District Traffic Superintendent slept in a bed which had a telephone-set screwed into the panel at its head. That night he got under the blankets fairly early. When he was all settled and ready to go to sleep—just as a man might say his prayers—he reached for the telephone and talked with the office.

"How are things?" he asked.

"About the same," said the assistant. "No trouble on the Los Angeles lines—nothing but rain down that way. A few failures on the Seattle lead, mostly around Shasta. But there's been quite a bit of trouble on the Central—up on the Hump."

"What's been the matter?"

"Just a good big storm, I guess. There's a lineman lost up there too—"

"Lost?"

"Well, hurt, I guess. But just disappeared so far. They're out now looking for his truck."

"That's too bad! Yes, that's bad. Hard on service too. Men get jittery—don't work well when that sort of thing's in the air. You'll get through tonight all right; traffic will be light."

"Oh, we'll get through—barring accident."

"Well, call me if you need me."

The DTS settled himself to go to sleep. He could hear the steady spatter of rain outside; somewhere water was dropping and splashing loudly from a clogged roof-gutter. He knew that he would go to sleep immediately, and wake up at four to call the office again. His was a twenty-four-hour shift during storms. Then he was asleep.

14

Against all the long rampart of the Coast Range the storm was beating. Northward, and here and there upon the higher peaks, there was snow. Elsewhere was only the slanting rain, and low cloud above the ridges. Upon the Trinity Mountains (most orthodoxly christened) the storm beat; equally it beat upon those other mountains (un-Christianly named in half-altered pagan tongue) Bully Choop and Yolla Bolly.

This is the roll-call of those chief summits rising against the first in-sweep of the storm from the ocean. Mt. Sanhedrin. Mt. Kinocti that watches above the lake. Sulphur Peak on whose slopes the geysers fume and spout. Then flat-topped St. Helena, named for a Russian princess, transmuted in romance to Spy-Glass Hill. Tamalpais of the long rim over-looking the Golden Gate. Grizzly Peak, high at ~~the~~ tall

white tower, facing toward the Bay. Twin-peaked Diablo, where the beacon flashes into the night. Black Mountain over against Loma Prieta; the Dark Hill. Mt. Hamilton of the star-watchers. Fremont Peak where the moldering intrenchments sink yearly closer to the ground. Southward, stretching far off, the ridges which bound the long Valley of the Salt Pools. Out of the pounding surf the Santa Lucias, rearing up their cliffs. Blanco Peak, Mt. Mars, Saddle Mountain by the Bishop's Town. St. Joseph and St. John. Upon them all was rain.

At last came the turn of the coast and the long trend eastward. There the Coast Ranges lost themselves among those higher mountains which bear the name of Gabriel, the Archangel. And on those peaks which shadow the Town of Our Lady Queen of the Angels—there too was rain.

NINTH DAY

FOUR TIMES in the known history of the earth have the mountains risen like a tide. Three times have the forces of air and water made head against those mountains, eating away the towering granite peaks into little rounded hills. Two hundred and fifty million years is the period of that cycle—majestic among earthly rhythms.

When, as now, the mountains have risen and stand high, then the storms rage most often and most fiercely. When the mountains again are low and the ice-caps melted and the seas grown shallow with wastage of granite, the air grows calm, and the languorous mood of the tropics reaches far toward north and south.

In this great struggle the chief allies of the hills are the plants. They bind the soil with their roots as with fine tough threads. With grass and fallen leaves they mat the earth against the rain-drops.

Dubious partners in the struggle are the animals. A few, like the beavers, work to hold back the water. Some, like the flyers and light-footed climbers, scarcely enter the conflict. The burrowers—rodents, insects, and worms—ease the rush of the water and give it entrance to the earth, but their castings of loose dirt wash away quickly. Worst of all, enemies against the hills, are the grazers and browsers. Like the stag in the fable, they eat away the cover of leaves and grass; with their sharp and hard hoofs they wear trails into the raw earth, and along the trails the running water cuts gullies.

Man, whose ancestors crawled out from the salt water, remains still a creature of the sea-margin, his habitat the low plains. A thousand feet is a small fraction of the ocean's depth; yet, if the ocean were suddenly to rise a thousand feet, man would be largely destroyed. Of Europe would remain only some mountainous islands; the United States would fare not much better. Mexico City, cupped among its mountains, would survive as the largest center of habitation in the world.

Living thus upon the plains, man is upon neutral ground between the mountains and the ocean. The torrents from the hills grow quiet, and let fall their silt. The great slow rivers here and there cut into the banks, and elsewhere build up the flood-plains or thrust forward the long fingers of their deltas into the sea.

Man allies himself now with the mountains, now with air and water. Like the beaver, he builds dams and retaining walls. Like the sheep, he strips the earth and cuts railways. He protects his habitations against the water, so that through the centuries the level of a city rises foot by foot. In the main, swayed by immediate need and convenience, he remains through the long course of time careless of the struggle, planless.

A father was out walking with his son, and they came to a small stream.

"Why is the water so muddy?" asked the little boy.

"It means the soil is washing away," said the father. "The government is sending a lot of men out to build dams and stop it."

But the brown stream was sign and symbol of a great conflict. Its present cycle would not be completed within a hundred million years, before which time man would very likely have run his course and vanished. By then the sky-towering crags would be reduced to gnawed stumps of granite, and a stormless climate, as in the Eocene, would cover most of the earth.

2

On the higher mountains snow was falling. Far beneath the surface the shrunken streams flowed in dim tunnels arched by snow; deep ground-waters fed them. The summer-darting trout were sunk in lassitude, half-hibernating. While the drifts covered the high country, it could suffer little erosion; that was for the time of thaw, when melting snow loosed the torrents.

On the foothills rain was falling. Brown water flowed in the gullies; it ate at the cut-banks; it foamed in the narrows.

For a certain section of canyon-rim above the S

of the Yuba River the hour approached. Neither accident nor the work of man was involved. The area was uninhabited. It offered foothold to few trees, and had never been lumbered. Its quartz yielded no gold. On the bare outcroppings, forest fires died for lack of fuel. But through centuries the river had worn at the base of the canyon-wall, and the side-gulches had grown deeper. At last the flowing water in one of the gulches finished washing away a little sand, and a tall rock shifted a quarter of an inch. The earth was already heavy with soaked-up rain. This small movement of the foundation unloosed the whole mass. With a long roar four million tons of the canyon-rim—rock, soil, chaparral—slid down five hundred feet before again coming to rest. Through trees and undergrowth masses of rock crashed a thousand feet farther until they reached the river-bed, and clogged the flow of the stream. Halfway down the canyon-side a tall cedar rooted in the slide stood leaning drunkenly.

In the valleys rain was falling. As it soaked through the earth, it leached away salts; rapaciously, the gnaw of its acidity ate even at solid limestone. By its buoyancy it floated away fallen leaves and seeds, pods and bark-scalings; as the water rose, logs and up-rooted trees yielded to the strange upward pull; they lifted from the mud where gravity had held them, and began the journey toward the sea-bottom.

Now swiftly, now more slowly, the water flowed always onward and downward at the pull of the earth's center. In the torrents of the stream beds, it moved boulders before it. The same force worked subtly in every turbid trickle which held some clay in suspension or rolled a little fine sand along with it.

Whether the cut or gully was man-made or "natural" was no concern of the rain. Here and there occurred a land-slip. Of much greater importance was the continual unheeded fall of loosened gravel and small stones. Blue clay soaked up until it grew soft, and flowed by its own weight, oozing slowly forward like hot candy poured upon a platter. On hill-sides the adobe soil grew heavy until great sections settled and slid, leaving behind them wide crescent-shaped scars of raw earth. And always the movement was downward, from the hill-tops toward the sea.

3

Along by Fox Farm was a stretch of highway that was in pretty bad shape that night. A rotary was working on it. The men in the rotary could see next to nothing; the flying snow reflected the lights right back in their faces. They were feeling their way along from snowstake to snowstake. Then came a bang, and a jolt, and the shear-bolts went.

"That's no pebble," said the swamper, and they both piled out into the snow, expecting to find that a boulder or tree trunk had fallen down on the highway.

"God, it's a car!" said the operator, for he could see the end of the rear bumper where the rotary's augers had chewed into it; everything else was drifted over with snow, or plastered. The two men looked at each other, and each saw that the other was scared.

The operator knocked the snow off the handle and opened the door. "One of those little telephone trucks," he said.

The swamper rolled up the tarpaulin at the back. The headlights of the rotary glared into the truck. The swamper took a good look. "Skis gone," he said. Then he looked at his watch—just after midnight.

"One man or two in these outfits?" asked the operator; he really knew, but he spoke to be saying something.

"One, along the highway," said the swamper, "two, when the wires are farther away."

They stood a moment staring at each other. Around their ankles the snow was moving; the force of the wind held it tight along the surface; it drifted heavily, like dry sand creeping on a dune.

Facing toward the forest on the side where the telephone-lines ran, the operator let out a mighty "Hal-loo!"

They waited, and in the rush of expectancy could hear the engine of the rotary throbbing steadily. A faint call came back from the forest. "Hear that?" cried the swamper, starting forward impulsively.

But the operator called again: "Hal-loo-oo, hal-loo-oo!"

"Loo-oo," came back.

"Echo," said the operator. "Hardly think there would be one in this wind."

While the swamper replaced the shear-bolts, the operator got into touch with the Station by radio, and talked with the night-foreman.

"I guess that's the fellow the telephone people were calling up about," said the night-foreman. "He hadn't reported in for quite a while. I'll call them."

"Do you want us to go look for him?"

"You can't without skis, and anyway, if he's been in there that long—"

4.

During the course of the storm more and more water leaked through the bullet-hole into the switch-box at Underpass 342-2. The wires and insulation became wet. At 1:12 A.M. the white flash of a short-circuit lighted the interior of the box; a fuse blew out; the pumps stopped. Rain was

heavily, and draining from the long slopes of the underpass into the sump. The two lanes of the underpass were separated by a concrete wall, and all the water drained into the northbound lane, whence it was pumped out. The northbound lane was therefore much more quickly affected.

Because of the storm and the lateness of the hour, only eight cars were approaching the underpass from the south within a distance which would involve them. They were in order:

- 1) A pick-up truck.
- 2) A small sedan.
- 3) A coupé containing three college youths.
- 4) Another coupé containing Miss Miller, a school-teacher. She was unused to driving in the rain or to being out alone on the highway so late at night; she was in what is known as "a mild state of nerves."
- 5) A jalopy containing a migrant worker, his wife, and their two children. The children were asleep in the back, on top of a clutter of household goods.
- 6) A car of the Highway Patrol containing Sergeant Daly and Officer O'Regan.
- 7) A truck-and-trailer laden with crates of carrots.
- 8) A large sedan containing a uniformed chauffeur, Mr. Andrew F. Magnusson (the mining magnate, no less), Mrs. Magnusson, and their twin daughters Deborah (Debby) and May (Mebby). They were returning from a formal dinner, and were dressed accordingly. Mr. Magnusson was asleep; Mrs. Magnusson was having digestive troubles; the girls were bored.

The patrol-car was going slowly; its presence and example stabilized the traffic. Drivers who passed it slowed down. The cars were therefore to arrive at the underpass with only a few changes in position.

The pick-up truck dipped into the underpass. Coming around the curve, the driver saw a sheet of water upon the pavement. He threw on his brake, and managed to check his car a little. The water sprayed out on both sides, but he was through almost before he knew what was happening. "Not more than three or four inches," he said to himself.

The water, rising rapidly, was six inches deep by the time the small sedan came along. It hit the water hard and skidded round a little, but the driver skillfully shifted into second and went through.

The college youth who was driving the coupé gave out a whoop when he saw the water, and stepped on the gas. The car slewed to the right, and water flew in all directions. "Yip-peel!" they all three yelled. Then, without even a cough,

the engine died. The driver whirled it with the starter for a little, and then remembered that this particular model was likely to stall in high water. They all did a little perfunctory cursing, and then lighted cigarettes. Their momentum had almost carried them through the flooded part. They discussed making a jump for it, but decided they would have more fun just sitting and seeing what happened.

The next thing that happened was Miss Miller and her mild state of nerves. When she saw water ahead and then a stalled car, she flipped her steering-wheel much too suddenly to the left and stepped hard on the throttle-pedal instead of dropping into second. Her back wheels spun and skidded; the car went half-way round: in confusion she threw on the brake before releasing the clutch, and killed her engine. Underpasses were terrifying to her at best; now she looked out, saw the good-natured grins of the college youths, and misinterpreted them as lascivious gloatings. Her confusions becoming panic, she snapped her ignition-switch, and tried madly to start her engine. It did not respond; having first killed the engine, she had turned the ignition off, not on, by snapping the switch; but this was a mistake to which she was prone even in her less excited moments. With a sideways glance at the grinning youths she abandoned herself to kidnapping, murder, and worse.

The truck-driver was skillful, but even a professional cannot do much when he rounds a curve into eight inches of water and sees two cars at crazy angles blocking three-quarters of the passage-way. At best a high-loaded truck with an equally high-loaded trailer is not a handy combination to maneuver. The driver did all he could; he dodged Miss Miller's car. But his outfit jack-knifed on him, and the trailer almost tipped over. All that saved it was the spilling off of some dozen crates of carrots. The truck-driver's cursing was not perfunctory.

But just as he was getting warmed up, the Magnussons arrived in their big sedan. The curve of the underpass was now so completely filled that the chauffeur saw the trailer in time to stop the car without hitting anything. Mrs. Magnusson and the twins squealed, and Mr. Magnusson came out of his sleep with a jump. The chauffeur sized up the situation quickly; he was just about to back out of the water when the jalopy arrived behind him.

The jalopy had only dim lights, and scarcely any brakes. The water, however, checked it a little, and it hit the rear of the big sedan with only a moderate bump. The Magnusson females squealed again; the migrant's two children awoke and bawled; the migrant mingled some barnyard epithets with the truck-driver's South-of-Market pro

Just at that moment a freight-train started to go over the rails above.

Jammed in an underpass, surrounded by water, with cars front and rear and a freight-train overhead—all this was too much for Mrs. Magnusson's well-established claustrophobia. With a determined "Gotta get out of here!" she reached for the door handle. Mr. Magnusson made a gesture to stop her and then (knowing his wife) gave it up. Ermine cloak, gold snood, and diamonds—Mrs. Magnusson stepped out into the muddy water. The twins, no longer bored, followed her with delighted yaps; it was the greatest lark.

"Go after her," ordered Mr. Magnusson to the chauffeur. "See they don't get into trouble."

As with a homing instinct, Mrs. Magnusson continued northward, although this direction brought her into deeper water. Followed by the chauffeur, she plodded on through the floating carrots, passed around Miss Miller's car, and reached the farther shore where she stood, magnificently dragged, and called back for her young.

But the college youths had sighted the girls, and piled out of their coupé to be of assistance. Mebbly (having the time of her life) threw a carrot at the boys; then both twins, hoisting their long dinner gowns well above four very attractive identical knees, dodged around the truck.

Just then the two officers arrived in the patrol-car. They stopped successfully, and surveyed the scene within the glare of their lights.

"Kee-riced!" said Officer O'Regan. Then he stepped out manfully into the water, well-shined puttees and all. He disliked accidents, especially gathering up fragments of people, and he was much relieved to find that nobody was hurt. On his way back, Debby got him under the chin with a well-hurled carrot. She was unbelievable enough to look at, and when he looked around he saw another one of the same. He relieved himself by bawling out the truck-driver, and asking him if he didn't know better than to go jack-knifing his outfit in an underpass.

In the meantime Sergeant Daly had set a flare back on the Highway to halt other drivers. Also the migrant had managed to back his jalopy out of the water.

Officer O'Regan reported to the Sergeant that nobody was hurt. The Sergeant then went back down the highway in the car to the nearest telephone to call headquarters and the highway-station and a tow-car. Officer O'Regan went sloshing back into the mess, wishing he were a sergeant.

He found Mr. Magnusson comfortably puffing a cigar. "I can't drive," said Mr. Magnusson. "Somewhere around here you'll find a chauffeur and three crazy women. They all be-

long to me." Officer O'Regan climbed in, and backed the car out.

Since everybody assumed that Miss Miller's car was stalled on account of the water, there was nothing more to be done at present. At this point the twins felt that the water was getting definitely cold, and so did the college youths; one of them remembered about having a full pint in the coupé. The truck-driver could not accomplish anything until the car in front of him was moved, and so they invited him along. The appearance of the policeman had reassured Miss Miller; she thawed out and invited the twins into her car. Everybody, including Miss Miller, had a drink, and began to feel warm and chummy.

"I wish we could get out of here before the tow-car comes," said one of the youths. "Those guys sure soak you."

"Why don't you try to start your car again, lady?" said the truck-driver.

"Surely," said Miss Miller. And since this time she looked to be certain that the ignition was on, the engine started perfectly. Miss Miller drove right out of the water.

Someone got a tow-rope, and Miss Miller pulled the other coupé out of the underpass and parked it. Then she said good-by and drove on. The boys knew they could get their engine going, once they were out of the standing water.

With the coupés out of the way the truck-driver managed to get straightened out and going again.

Shortly afterwards the Sergeant got back. He walked over the railroad tracks to the other end of the south-bound lane. He flagged at that end, and Officer O'Regan at the other, and in that way they moved two-way traffic through the upper side of the underpass. Even yet the water in it was not above six inches deep, and a driver who was forewarned and going slowly would have no trouble.

The tow-car got there next. Officer O'Regan told the garage-men that there was a whole mess of cars in the underpass, but when the garage-men drove in there, all they could see was a lot of carrots floating around in the water. They said some things about a dumb cop, and then backed out and told him so.

"Kee-riced!" said Officer O'Regan.

The highway gang got there next, and just behind their truck a fire-engine to pump the underpass. But before the fire-engine could get started, one of the highway gang located the trouble in the switch-box. He pulled the switch, dried things out a bit, plugged the bullet-hole with a wad of paper, put in a spare fuse, and threw the switch back in. The pumps started with a whir. The highway gang collected the cars so that they would not plug the drains.

An hour after it all began, the drivers who were going through the underpass did not know anything had been happening.

5

At ten minutes after four, through the workings of a well-adjusted sub-conscious mind, the District Traffic Superintendent woke up. Automatically he reached for the telephone on the head of the bed, and talked with the office.

"She's not so good," said his assistant. "Up on the Hump, I mean—the Central."

"What's the trouble?"

"Oh, just a line here and a line there—too much soft snow, I guess."

"Isn't Plant fixing them up for you?"

"Oh, yes. We keep getting them back, but we're losing them faster than we get them back. They're just sending in another crew from Sacramento, and a Modesto crew is going north to back up at Sacramento. We're all right now—hardly any calls to go through. But we'll have to start delaying calls when the nine o'clock rush comes, if things don't get better."

"No big breaks?"

"Not yet."

"Well, I don't like it. Just a moment while I figure it out."

... All right. Get me Chicago, will you, please?"

A minute later he was talking with the Chicago office, which co-ordinated the telephone routings of the continent. He explained his needs briefly, and asked that some of the lines from San Francisco to the East be connected *via* Los Angeles so as to relieve the hard-pressed Central Transcontinental. Chicago agreed, and the DTS again made himself comfortable beneath the blankets.

Even before he could settle fully into slumber, Chicago had talked with Los Angeles and Denver. But Denver demurred. A new storm was reported over Utah, moving easterly into Colorado. Because of this threat, Denver was nervous, and was loath to assume any additional load. Chicago granted the difficulty. Chicago then talked elsewhere, here and there, over the continent.

As the result of these far-flung conversations, certain switches were flipped. The operators in San Francisco were ignorant of these changes; every girl still continued to see before her, for example, ten jacks beneath the name NEW YORK. For six of the jacks the voice-channels still followed the route over Donner Pass and through Salt Lake City and Denver. For the other four the voice-channels passed by way of Los Angeles, Oklahoma City, and St. Louis.

The DTS, knowing that he had prepared as well as possible against the power of the storm, sank deeper into sleep.

6

The great mass of polar air centering over the valley of the Yukon was discharging itself in two far-reaching rivers of wind. In their life-histories these two great wind-torrents may be compared to identical twins parted soon after birth and reared in different environments. The first, which passed over the land, altered but slowly; it remained cold and dry, and penetrated far toward the tropics as a frigid blast. But the second, which passed over the water, became rapidly moist and temperate.

This second polar discharge, as one of its functions in the current scheme of weather, fed new supplies of moisture into the storm which was still centered off the coast of Oregon. The process was grandiose. The cold and dry air was blowing as a northeast wind when it descended from the mountains. A little south of the Alaskan coast, it came definitely within the orbit of the storm, and thereafter followed around a roughly semi-circular course from two to three thousand miles in circuit depending upon the distance from the center. During the long transit the wind shifted from north to northwest, to west, to southwest; finally, as it approached the California coast, the current of air was moving directly from the south.

Nearing the coast this now temperate and moist air was forced upward, partly by overrunning colder, heavier air near the coast, partly by ascending the barrier of the mountains. Rising, it was cooled and discharged its moisture. The rain-drops and snowflakes falling upon California could therefore in the main be traced back to a great arc of northerly ocean-surface beginning in the Gulf of Alaska.

Even before this polar air had begun to pour out from the Arctic, a mass of tropical air had been lying quiescent between Hawaii and the North American coast. During the days of the polar outbreak this tropical air continued on the whole intact and unchanged. The unusual atmospheric activities to the northward had jostled it to the south, but had not sucked it in toward the storm-center. It remained warm and saturated with moisture—the atmospheric opposite of the polar air.

If these bodies of polar and tropical air had been brought suddenly into contact, the resulting weather disturbance would have been catastrophic, beyond the experience or even the imagination of men. Any such unprecedented, world-shaking disaster, however, was rendered impossible.

the intervening temperate zone, three thousand miles in width. What actually happened was that the polar air which reached southward across the Pacific became temperate, and only then, as it began to turn eastward toward the coast, came into contact with the tropical air. The contrast between the two was still sufficient to produce thunderstorms and heavy rain-squalls. But the easterly-moving current just grazed the more southerly air-mass, and during the first days of storm only a negligible amount of tropical air was carried along to expend its rain on the coast.

During one of the earlier days, however, a divergent tongue of northern air actually thrust itself some few hundred miles southward into the tropical area. This advance was accompanied by the usual thunderstorms and torrential showers which may be expected when cold air thus protrudes itself beneath warmer, moist air. The advance, if long continued, would perhaps have resulted in the formation of a wholly new storm center. But the complex of air-currents around the whole world shifted slightly at that time so that the main stream of the polar outbreak continued its easterly course, leaving the intrusion of northern air within the tropical air.

For a day or two thunder continued to grumble and rain-storms to form and dissipate. But in the absence of any general wind-current to force them one against the other the northern and the southern air accommodated their differences. Lying over the surface of the tropical ocean the northern air rapidly became so warm and moist in its lower levels as to be indistinguishable from its neighbor. Higher up, however, a cloud deck still remained to mark the boundary between the still frigid upper levels of the northern air, and the much warmer tropical air of the same altitude.

The passengers of a liner crossing that part of the ocean watched the beads of water continue to form on their tall glasses of iced drinks, but did not know that they were passing from one air-mass to another of very different history. They were conscious of no change in the weather conditions except that some clouds for a while cut off the sun. But if they could have ascended, they would have found that in one place the air grew cooler much more rapidly than in another.

Because of this difference, the two bodies of air, so alike at the surface, were vastly different in their potentialities. The tropical air could produce extremely heavy and long-continued, but steady, rainfall. The old polar air would be likely to let loose its smaller amount of moisture with almost explosive violence and full accompaniments of thunder and lightning, towering formations of massed cloud, high winds, and violent turbulence.

During the morning of the ninth day since the storm had formed off the coast of Japan, as part of a readjustment of atmospheric forces around the world the storm-area extended to more southerly latitudes. A large portion of the tropical air-mass began to move northeasterly toward the California coast and behind it followed the old polar air:

7

The J.M. could feel the letter in his pocket. That air-line job was open to him again. It paid more than he was getting, and the chances for the future might be better too. He admitted that he had been unhappy in the Weather Bureau; his mathematical training did not seem to help him, and sometimes he thought that it even was a handicap. Sometimes it seemed as if the Chief were using only the same methods that any shepherd might have used back in the time of the Patriarchs; he just looked at the sky, and decided from the appearance of things what weather would probably be coming along after a while. The shepherd, of course, never saw farther than the actual horizon. By the weather-map the Chief extended his view for several thousands of miles. There was a tremendous pyramiding of information, but not much change in method.

The J.M. broke off his musings about the personal problem, and turned to the map.

Maria had had a baby! The event was no more unusual than in organic life, and had not been unexpected; in fact, during the last twenty-four hours, the eastward bulge of the isobars had given a distinct suggestion of mammalian pregnancy. Now, however, the appearance of the map suggested rather the process of cell-division known as mitosis; the new storm centering over Utah was already an independent entity, but had not yet wholly separated itself from the mother storm off the coast. Already the J.M. was thinking of the newcomer as Little Maria, and his attitude was that of an old friend of the family. "Why, I've known your mother," he found himself thinking, "since she was a little ripple on a cold front north of Titijima!"

But to know the mother, he realized, did not allow anyone to predict much about the daughter. The daughter would develop her own personality, and follow her own career. Little Maria would probably make herself well known to the world. Three-quarters of the United States lay ahead of her, and over that area there were many contrasts of atmospheric conditions as the result of the recent north-and-south movements. All this region was a reservoir of energy for Little Maria to tap. And beyond the United States lay the Atlantic and Europe. Given opportunity and a little time, the J.M.

thought that he could work out mathematically the route which the storm would follow and the characteristics which it would display at given points.

The Chief came to take a look at the map. "That new storm," he said, "she's not so much now, but she'll be headlines when she gets to New York."

The J.M. jumped mentally; he had been about to say almost the same thing. "What?" he blurted in his surprise, "you mean Little Maria?" Then he shut his lips quickly, realizing that he had exposed his childishness; perhaps the Chief would miss the point.

But the Chief smiled with a little quizzical expression. "Hn-n?" he said. "You name them too? It must be nice to be new at the game. I used to do it, but I ran out of names years ago. I called them mostly after heroes that I read about in history—Hannibal, and so forth. I remember Marshal Ney developed into a terror; but Genghis Khan fizzled out."

Suddenly the J.M. felt at home in the Weather Bureau. Never before had the Chief and he had anything between them in confidence. He had never suspected the Chief of any hidden imagination.

"That's Maria off the coast there," he volunteered.

The Chief let his eyes move out across the Pacific. In mid-ocean were three little storms; the J.M. had never named them individually. First there had been two and he had called them the Twins; now he thought of them as the Triplets; for several days they had been blocked behind the great sweep of the polar incursion, and now they were dying. But the Chief let his eyes pass beyond the Triplets to where a new vigorous storm was just leaving the Sea of Okhotsk.

"Named this one yet?"

"No. I've been using girls' names in -ia, but I've nearly run out."

"How about Victoria?"

"Fine."

"All right—Victoria she is, but Victoria won't concern us much for several days, if ever."

The Chief brought his glance back along the more southerly ocean clear to California.

"Hn-n?" he said finally. "There's just one thing I don't like."

"You mean that belt of cloud?"

"Yes. There's a big lot of tropical air moving in toward the coast, but that cloud belt means something is happening in the upper air. It may be some little local eddy, and it may be something a lot more."

"If one of those ships could send up a radiosonde, it would be fine."

"Hn-n? Yes, the radiosonde—" The Chief's voice rang with irony. "A whole radio sending-station weighing next to nothing; you send her up with a cute little balloon, clear into the stratosphere; and as she goes, she sends you back messages about temperature and humidity—just the kind of gadget Americans all love. It's the best publicity that meteorology ever had, but it seems to me I never have one of those upper-air reports when and where I need it."

He stared again at the location of the two ships reporting cloud.

"Well," he went on, "today we're in a little ridge of higher pressure between the two Marias, and we'll have something of a lull. Tomorrow the tropical air will move in, and there'll be rain a-plenty. And about the next day we ought to know whether that cloudbank out there means anything."

Half an hour earlier the J.M. had been telling himself that at the first chance he would show the letter to the Chief and say he was leaving. But now, for the first time, he felt warm toward the Chief. Paradoxically, he realized, this sudden friendship came not because the Chief had been scientific, but just the reverse. And he himself had been equally unscientific. Then he had a sudden new thought. Perhaps there was something about the human mind itself which made it feel comfortable to think of a storm as a person, not an equation.

At the same time a new little glow of pride came to him about the Weather Bureau. Why, the Bureau recorded and distributed the very observations which the air-line meteorologists depended on! The Bureau made the only public forecasts; and then stood by for the blame—usually not much praise—that was coming. In the end, a private meteorologist was only another fellow working for a company. And the professors were only theorists. But ever since he was a kid, he'd wanted to be a weather-man, and there was only one place he could be that. When you came right down to it the air-line people dealt in air-lines; only the Weather Bureau dealt in weather.

8

Mr. Reynoldhurst was a very great man in the domain of petroleum; from Maracaibo to Bahrein his lightest opinion was quoted, and his official pronouncement was as the yea or nay of a tribal patriarch.

From Mr. Reynoldhurst's hotel suite in San Francisco his private secretary had just put through a call to New York. "Good morning, Davy," said Mr. Reynoldhurst, casually and informally; transcontinental calls were for him no novelty.

The impulses conveying the sound traveled in about one-

tenth of a second the three thousand miles from ocean to ocean, by way of Salt Lake City, Denver, and Chicago. Every modulation of Mr. Reynoldhurst's resonant and authoritative voice was vibrating in the ear-drum of his chief legal adviser.

Just then the decaying bole of the tree which since the year 1789 had lain on a rocky ledge in the Sierra Nevada became weighted with snow past its point of equilibrium and began to roll. For a moment it hung on the last projection of the ledge; then it slid sideways, up-ended, dropped thirty feet, struck on a rock, catapulted through the air, spun end-over-end, and crashed through the tops of three small spruce trees; gathering speed—now rolling, now hurtling through the air—it began the descent of a long, snow-covered canyon side.

"The matter will bear watching," said Mr. Reynoldhurst into the telephone transmitter. "In view of the present international situation we can scarcely—"

At that moment the tree-bole, finishing a last hundred-foot leap, struck squarely among the cross-arms of Pole 1-243-7 of the Central Transcontinental Lead. That pole was fifteen inches thick at the base and thirty feet tall; it was of select flawless Douglas fir from the Olympic Peninsula; it was firmly set in rocky soil. The four heavy cross-arms were reinforced with steel braces; each cross-arm carried ten glass insulators each bearing a heavy copper wire. The strength of the pole was calculated to withstand any attack of wind, ice, or snow.

As the tree-bole struck, the pole snapped like a dry twig. Every cross-arm broke; the steel braces bent and twisted; most of the insulators were shattered; nearly all the wires broke and the curling loose ends crossed and short-circuited the few which remained unbroken.

At one moment the Central Transcontinental Lead had been an important link in world-communications. One moment later it was nothing.

"Hello, hello!" said Mr. Reynoldhurst sharply; inefficiency always irritated him. He had certainly been cut off. He pressed his buzzer.

"Put that call through again," he said to his secretary. "Some fool telephone girl cut me off. And register a complaint with the Telephone Company."

"Yes, Mr. Reynoldhurst."

Some ends of the broken wires were still swinging back and forth; the tree-bole was settling into the snow bank where it had landed.

The secretary jiggled the telephone. "Operator," said a voice from the other end. "Mr. Reynoldhurst's call to New York has been broken off," said the secretary. "Will you

A woman about to enter a Reno courtroom for divorce proceedings had grown panicky and put in a call for her still hopeful husband in San Francisco; when the call was delayed, she cancelled it.

Almost before the echoes of the crash had ceased reverberating among the mountain solitudes, the toll testboardmen at Sacramento knew that the Central Transcontinental had suffered a total failure. A few minutes later, merely by using their instruments, without even stepping outside, they had located the break within a quarter of a mile. By telephone the word went to the repair crew closest to the break, and in five minutes more the green trucks were moving on U. S. 40. Since the break was a total failure and might be extensive, the Modesto crew was ordered up from Sacramento toward the Pass, and crews in Stockton and Marysville (like reserves mustered for a counter-attack) were told to stand by.

To every important long-distance office in the West the fall of the tree brought sudden emergency. Lines were dead, calls could not go through, tickets piled up as calls were delayed. Operators felt the sudden tenseness. Supervisors talked to irate or worried or importunate customers. The rule was "First come, first served," but there had to be exceptions. Police and hospitals had precedence; there were other real emergencies. But also there were the egotists who thought their own business was always most important. Big small-town business-men foh-ed and fumbled; reporters bluffed about the exigencies of getting to press; rich women threatened to report supervisors for impertinence.

Most of all the San Francisco office felt the stress. All eastern calls must be routed to the south. The change was accomplished chiefly by the testboardmen; by flipping a few switches in co-ordination with the Los Angeles office they soon established new direct circuits over which San Francisco might talk to Chicago, Denver, and the other chief centers. The sudden increase of traffic over-crowded the southern wires, and tickets started to pile up. And even Los Angeles was affected; ordinarily Los Angeles calls reached Reno *via* Sacramento, but now the connection could be made only *via* Salt Lake City.

The congestion and delay of traffic was the result of the decrease in the number of wires, and also of the destruction of the carefully planned direct routings. To increase the number of wires the Plant Department "warmed up" all the extra circuits which were generally not in use except during disasters and the Christmas holidays. To patch up new direct routings without creating new confusion was a work demanding both knowledge and skill. Since the eastern calls

foreman had a portable telephone attached to the wires, and through it he kept in touch with Sacramento. Once he came back looking not so comfortable.

"Well, they found him," he said.

Everybody knew what he meant. They paused.

"He was under the snow, but some fellows from Truckee brought in a collie dog that was trained to work in the mountains, and the dog found him."

Still they waited.

"For Christ's sake, who do you think you're workin' for—the Old People's Home? Sure, he was dead. Why don't you get on with the job?"

They worked hard after that, and nobody talked much.

9

For the newspapers Max and Jen were not very useful. Their being unmarried lent a touch of piquancy, and her hair could be played up as blonde. The reporters got a photograph from Jen's sister, and after the art department of the *Register* had put in some work the picture was not very valuable for identification, but it had some suggestions of the *femme fatale*. From the newspaperman's point of view, however, the trouble with the story was that it had no follow-up; the pair just went out of the picture as Dot saw them drive away into the rain.

A rumor cropped up about a Nevada couple who had been married in Yuma. But when a reporter located an embarrassed young couple in a tourist-court, the girl turned out to be a Mexican-type brunette, and the story was a flop.

The officers of the Highway Patrol kept working, especially between San Francisco and Sacramento, and from there by U. S. 40 over the pass to the state line. In the thorough and unhurrying way of good professionals they asked a lot of questions at garages and service-stations; conscientiously plying their trade, they ran down a few unlikely rumors. But they discovered absolutely nothing.

10

On the University campus the sea-gulls stood about by ones and twos on the green lawn—refugees from the storm. (Now, over their homes on reef and ledge the furious invading waves pounded and swept and foamed; high upon the cliffs the salt-spume filled the air.) Misplaced-looking, they stood, or flew here and there in restless, purposeless flights, or walked a few steps this way or that, raising feet awkwardly as if at the foreign feeling of grass tickling on their webs.

A professor preparing a lecture on modern literature

looked out and saw them. "Sea-gulls on the grass," he thought. "*Sea-gulls on the grass, alas!* Perhaps that was what she meant. That would make sense—means a big storm at sea. They look the part too—moping! *Sea-gulls on the grass, alas!*"

11

Keeping U. S. 40 open over the Pass, thought the Superintendent, was just one crisis after another. Yesterday it had been the jam at Windy Point, and tomorrow it would be something else, but today it was wind. Not so much snow was falling; the clouds were thinner; little scraps of blue sky showed through. The Superintendent could feel some shift in the weather, although he could not figure out just what was happening. But the end of the storm would come with a sharply rising barometer and a wind-shift into the north, or northwest at least. And now his barometer stayed low, and the wind had veered only from south to west.

This wind had been growing stronger all morning. By noon it was a gale. The rotaries had been throwing snow over the windrows since Sunday, and now the wind seemed to pick up all this snow on the windward side, and blow it back. The snow-walls on both sides of the roadway were six, or eight, or ten feet high by now. Across the top the wind swept unhindered, but within the shelter of the walls it swirled and eddied and dropped the snow which it was blowing along. From the crest of the windward side the snow blew out sometimes until it looked like a snow-banner from a mountain peak, and at the foot of this wall the drifts built out so fast that you could stand and watch them grow. A rotary would go through leaving a clean track behind it, and before the rotary was out of sight, six inches of snow might have drifted across the road.

So far during the storm the plows had kept a two-lane highway open, but now the snow blew in faster than the rotaries could move along to throw it out, and after each push-plow the cleared passageway was narrower than it had been the time before. By eleven in the morning the Superintendent realized that he was going to have a real struggle to keep the road open at all. He mapped out his campaign.

He gave orders. At the Lake and at Baxter his men swung the long steel gates across the highway, and neither truck nor car went through without chains on. At Baxter the drivers protested in plenty; Baxter was sheltered in a thick pine forest, and the wind did not seem strong; not much snow was falling. People never realized that conditions higher up might be different, and might have grown worse while condi-

tions lower down were growing better. But all their protesting made no difference; they went ahead with chains, or not at all.

Next, the Superintendent checked over mentally the location of all his plows. For the last forty-eight hours they had worked continuously; many of them had not been under shelter in that time; they took gasoline and oil from the service truck. There were six rotaries and nine push-plows for about thirty miles of highway, and from long experience the Superintendent, even without the aid of radio, knew very nearly where each one was at a given moment. The location of the push-plows was not so important, for they moved at twenty or thirty miles an hour, and could soon get anywhere they were needed. But a working rotary moved at only a half mile an hour, and to shift it to some other spot meant that it would be out of action for a while, at a time when it was most needed.

From the wind-direction the Superintendent knew that the problem in the next few hours would be the five miles just west of the summit. One rotary was on the east face of the pass and would have to stay there; two others were similarly pinned to the lower fifteen miles of the west slope; that left him only three for the real fight, and two of those were not well placed. By radio he ordered one of them to turn around and start working back on the opposite side of the road; the other one was coming the right direction already.

Closing his eyes a moment, the Superintendent figured the future positions of all the plows—at twelve, one, and two o'clock, which stretches of road would then be freshly cleared, which ones would be drifted beyond the power of the push-plows. He knew that by one o'clock three miles of the road near Fox Farm would be next to impassable. He mentally tried various rearrangements of his plows, but there was always a bottle-neck somewhere or other. And all his figurings assumed that the wind got neither worse nor better, that his operators made no bad errors, that his machines did not break down, and that no accident blocked the road and hindered the work of the plows.

The Superintendent sighed. To lose his road was to lose his honor. Already he realized that the road was half-lost, but by taking the cars through in convoys he might prevent its actual closing. At such a moment he felt like jumping into his car and dashing through the storm to exhort his men to greater efforts. But that course would have been foolish; the machines, not the men, were doing the work, and the rotaries had already been driven as hard as they could be forced. Instead, he went into the radio room.

It was a quiet warm little place where a man was not even

conscious of the storm outside. The lights glowed on the instrument-panel. In a calm voice he talked with the gate-keeper at Baxter—stop all trucks with trailers, tell people they'll have to go through in convoy probably. He gave the same orders to the gate-keeper at the Lake. He organized the convoy. With the present wind the east face of the Pass was a leeward exposure and could probably be kept two lanes wide; so the one end of the convoy could be at the summit. He placed the other end a little below Fox Farm.

He grabbed some dinner, and then it was one o'clock. Over the radio he talked to two of his rotaries. Things were pretty bad, they said. Except just behind a plow the passageway was scarcely more than one-car width, and cars meeting had a hard time to pass.

The Superintendent went down to the garage. "Get ready to start convoying," he ordered. Then he jumped into his own car, and drove out down the road into the storm. He had to have a look at things for himself.

He came to the first rotary. It was faced downhill, on the windward side of the road. To throw into the wind would mean that much of the snow blew back immediately and so the great parabola of snow was arched right over the highway. But the angle was too low, and some of the snow was not clearing the wall on the leeward side. The Superintendent jumped out and yelled orders; the operator raised the angle.

Beyond the rotary the road was drifted. Even in the narrow center lane the snow was here and there eight inches deep. The Superintendent pulled aside to let an approaching car pass him. The car stalled and stopped. "He's stuck!" thought the Superintendent, half in panic. But the car had an Idaho license, and the driver must have been experienced in the mountains. He backed out, shoved in again as far as he could, backed out again, without even stalling his engine, and then pushed through the drift and went on. The Superintendent waved enthusiastically out the window; most drivers would have stuck right there and jammed the road. But the incident settled his mind about the need of convoying.

About one-thirty the first convoy started through. The orange-colored highway truck led it down from the summit. Following in its tire-tracks came a dozen cars, three trucks and a bus. Another highway car followed to be sure everyone got through safely. By no stretch of imagination could anyone say there was a two-lane passageway; in places the question was whether there was a passageway at all. As usual, some of the drivers were nervous and frightened; the Superintendent always wondered why such people ever tried the Pass in winter; perhaps they didn't try it more than once. But actually everyone was safer than in fine weather, for in

the convoy even the reckless drivers had to go slowly and the high snow-walls on either side made it impossible for anyone to drive off the road. All you could do was merely to follow the car ahead of you, and after a while you came through and the convoy was broken up. Beyond the ends of the convoy the road was still bad, but it was two lanes wide in most places.

About three o'clock the situation began to improve. The wind fell off a little, and besides, by this time the wind had already blown into the road most of the loose snow which lay readily at hand to windward. Also at this time the Superintendent was able to have three rotaries converge on the worst stretch of road.

First he ordered the convoy cut down to three miles, and then to two. Finally, at four-thirty he stopped convoying altogether, and gave orders to the gate-keepers to let the trucks and trailers start coming through. There was still a chance that one of these might jack-knife and block the road, but the Superintendent liked to feel that the road was entirely open.

By five o'clock he was sure that things were in hand. More snow was falling again, but the wind had eased off considerably and was shifting back into the south. It had been a close call, but he hadn't exactly lost the road, even though convoying was the next thing to it. If he had to close the gates for a while after midnight to get a chance to clean the road up, that hardly counted either, for during those hours there was scarcely any traffic. And tomorrow would be another day, most likely with an entirely different problem.

12

From every river and creek in the great horseshoe of mountains about the Sacramento Valley the water was pouring out. Foot by foot the level rose at the gauges.

From the lowest parts of the by-pass lands men herded out the cattle and the sheep, and drove them to pastures a little higher, close to the levees which formed the boundaries of the by-passes. The steers sloshed through the sappy ground, bawling now and then. The ewes were dragged and heavy with rain. The lambs trotted uncertainly, stopping and starting; they bleated nervously.

In every river town came a stirring of excitement; people went out on the bridges and stood there in the rain, watching the brown water flow and the bits of driftwood slide by. "Nineteen-point-three," someone would read, looking at the gauge. "She's risen more'n a foot since noon."

That afternoon the water at Colusa bridge rose to an even twenty on the gauge, and then quietly began to spill over the

long crest of Colusa Weir into Butte Basin, and thence flow into Sutter By-Pass. The water topped Tisdale Weir next, and then Moulton. On the other side of the Valley, gauge-readings were rising rapidly on the Feather River and its tributaries, the Yuba and the Bear. At Vernon where the Feather flowed into the Sacramento, the great stretch of Fremont Weir—nearly two miles long—offered passageway for the combined rivers into Yolo By-Pass. In the early darkness the brown water rose to the concrete lip of the weir and flowed across into the wide plain between the levees.

At Sacramento the gauge-reading was as yet just under twenty. There the American was pouring its flood into the main stream. As yet its outflow had moved down the channel of the Sacramento between the levees without preventing the waters of the upper rivers from following the same course. As a result, water had not yet begun to flow over the wicket-tops of Sacramento Weir, four miles up-stream from the city. But the level at the gauge was steadily rising.

The General had stayed in the office later than previously. He only sighed when the phone rang again, and his secretary said, "Long-distance." It was one of the big asparagus growers in the delta country; his thousands of rich acres lay behind low levees which he was legally restrained from raising.

"Well, I don't know," said the General. "Up to this morning I would have said you were safe, but the Weather Bureau thinks we may get a lot of rain tomorrow. We have some leeway left even so, and a good deal depends on just how the rain hits."

"You won't open those gates any sooner than you need to, will you?"

The General had been a military man for many years, and he bridled at the implication of the question.

"Look here," he snapped. "I'll order those wickets opened exactly when I think is the *right* time, and no down-stream rancher and no up-stream Chamber of Commerce will tell me when *is* the right time either."

The General accepted an apology and hung up.

13

"We've been having a pretty easy time of it," said the L.D. to his assistant. "No break on any big line except that one up by French Bar. Of course we aren't through with it yet. Anyway, we're going to have something to show with, next summer. The company ought to have dividends."

"There's a big lot of tropical air moving in some time tomorrow," said the Chief Service Officer of Air-Lines. "That means heavy rains; but pretty quiet conditions generally. We ought to have a fairly good day."

14

Before midnight the Transcontinental Streamliner began to pull out of the station at Chicago. Its departure, like the sailing of an ocean-liner, mingled festivity and solemnity. On the platform a woman dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief, and near her an after-theater party muffled in evening wraps waved gayly at a corsaged debutante who waved back through the window of her drawing-room. Even inside the shelter of the train-shed the cold was bitter.

The streamliner clicked along over the switches of the yard at a leisurely pace. Two young men were sitting in the lounge-car. One of them was reading a pamphlet which described the train, and was commenting upon it.

"The mildest thing the publicity-men can say about this train is 'a miracle of modern engineering and art.' From there they work up. 'And truly the train may stand for a symbol of what is best in modern civilization—tough steel, aluminum alloys, resplendent chromium, satiny copper, crimson leather, shining glass—all shaped into a creation for safety and speed, power and comfort—a thing of beauty!' Whoever wrote that passage didn't think restraint a virtue."

Across half a continent the tracks stretched out ahead. Through the cold sheen of the winter moonlight the streamliner would cross the snow-covered plains of Illinois and Iowa. It would speed through the long reaches of Nebraska during the forenoon, and give afternoon and early evening to Wyoming. Less than twenty-four hours upon the way it would click down Echo Canyon, fifteen hundred miles from Chicago. Before the second night was ended it would cross Utah and Nevada. Daybreak would find it climbing the Sierra wall into California; at noon it was scheduled to end its run, and halt at the shore of San Francisco Bay—twenty-two hundred miles in forty hours.

Over all those miles of track the streamliner had privilege and right of way. Freights, locals, and working-equipment took the sidings. The green lights glowed; the semaphores signaled open track. Dispatchers sent the streamliner through; trackwalkers patrolled ahead of it; snowplows cleared the way. The premier train of the run must not be halted.

Already the city was behind. The train had gathered speed. Now it whistled for a crossing.

The deep note sounded far through the moonlight—like the sudden mysterious bay of some great hound, unearthly

of the Old People. But those centuries have meant little to earth and sun; as today, the winter storms swept down when Balcony House was new and fat babies rolled on its terrace. Most likely a storm made little difference in the life of those diminutive, nimble-footed people whose ancient toe-holds still pit the face of the cliffs. In the winter their corn-fields on the mesa-top needed no care; the season held off the nomad raiders who came harrying in summer. While the storm raged and ice-glaze made the cliff-paths impassable, the dwellers in Balcony House may have settled down to their quietest and happiest days. The granaries were deep with corn and beans; the spring at the back of the rock-shelter flowed (as it still flows) with pure, cool water. Their dogs lived with them, and their turkeys were penned at the back of the houses. A fire of a few sticks sufficed in the thick-walled houses and the underground club-rooms of the men. For clothing there were deer-skins and blankets of turkey feathers. The great over-hang of arched rock was a shelter from snow and wind.

An interval for talk and laughter, for weaving, for fashioning of arrow-heads, for discussion about next year's corn-planting, for long rituals of religion—when the storm had passed by and the ice-glaze was shattered beneath the unveiled sun, then was time enough to climb the cliffs, and go visiting to the other villages.

But modern man cannot withdraw. He expects much more of his civilization; he has spread it far and wide until it sprawls; he has given hostages. Therefore, he must sally forth about his flocks and herds; he must look to his roads and ditches, his levees and culverts, his wires and rails. To protect his machines he must invent other machines and with them labor against the storm. The honor of the battle is now not so much to skill and courage as to flawless steel and cool bearings.

At the end, our cities will stand like those others. In the year when Edward of England made war on Llewellyn the Welshman and Ser Marco Polo was new in the court of Kublai Khan, the rains failed; year after year, drought lay upon the mesa-land. As some think, the people began to raise a great temple to placate the gods of storm; that temple still stands unfinished. Before the twenty-four years of drought had passed, the people were gone; dry winds swirled ashes in empty courtyards.

Whether the civilization of a land withdraws before the storm or fights against it; the end will be the same. Man is of the air, and the air must rule him. Drought or flood, cold winds and ice, heat, blown dust, shift of the storm track—in the end they overcome even the imperturbable machines.

During a lull in the storm the old coyote went hunting again. He saw the airplane-beacon flashing into the darkness; he crossed the railroad; he leaped into the highway just after a push-plow had gone by.

He came to the remembered place where he had scented something strange beneath the snow. High above him at the top of the cliffs a rotary was working; some of the thrown snow, falling a hundred feet, settled as fine powder upon his fur. He nuzzled about. The depth of snow was greater than it had been before, and so the scent was fainter. As yet that night he had not killed, and now the saliva began to drool at the corners of his mouth. But mingled with the pleasant smell were others which made him suspicious and wary. He went prudently on his way, remembering the spot for future nights.

3

In San Francisco the rain was a steady downpour, heavier than ever. In Los Angeles the rain had stopped; there was a bright blue sky between broken clouds, and a brilliant sunrise. Portland had rain and Spokane snow, but in Seattle men pulled their overcoats closer to shut out a chilling dry easterly.

El Paso was having a sudden cold snap with snow-squalls. Abilene reported trees blown down in a fifty-mile gale. Galveston and Corpus Christi were being deluged with warm rain drifting in upon a steady southerly wind.

Tampa, half way between Miami and Pensacola, was ten degrees colder than either, but had a clear sky. Jacksonville and Savannah were dank and chilly beneath thick low-lying fog.

Washington had calm air and a brilliant sun which seemed to shed no warmth; the temperature was eight above zero. New York lacked two degrees of being as cold as Washington, and Philadelphia was a little warmer than either of them. In Boston the temperature was even higher, but a steady north wind made people feel chillier.

Buffalo was the cold pole of the country. As at Washington the air was still and the sun brilliant. But the temperature was sixteen below zero, and the newspapers reported four deaths from cold.

Detroit and Cleveland were below zero, but were warmer than they had been on the preceding day. Chicago was growing much warmer. Memphis had fog; Kansas City reported a thaw. Havre and Bismarck were almost as cold as Buffalo.

All these reports suddenly presented to the average com-

mon-sense citizen would certainly have led him to conclude that the weather in the United States upon this particular day was a mere crazy-quilt, wholly lacking in scheme.

To the J.M., looking at the ordered isobars of the finished map, the weather displayed a pattern which was precise, comparatively simple, and in a sense even purposive. The weather of any place in the eastern United States, for instance, could be readily explained by reference to its location within the high-pressure area which centered over Lake Ontario. In addition, the usual circulation of air from west to east was re-establishing itself.

The most obvious sign was Little Maria. She centered over Abilene, and was giving Texas almost every variety of weather. But there were other signs. The high-pressure area was slowly drifting eastward. He checked back upon the maps of the last three days and traced its movement—Kansas City, Terre Haute, Cleveland; and this morning its center was east of Buffalo. Maria still stood firm, and the Triplets were dead; but Victoria, growing in power, had already reached the western Aleutians. Over the Pacific the long arm of the northern invasion was shrinking back, and over the Yukon valley the pressure was falling. Again he looked at the preceding maps. On Tuesday that pressure had stood at 1050; on Wednesday it had dropped to 1042; today it was 1035. Once this pressure should have fallen a little farther, the outflow of northern air would cease, and Maria either would pass into some new phase, or else—cut off from fresh supplies of air—must die.

The Chief came in, and the J.M. felt himself suddenly grow warm with the new sense of comradeship.

"How's Maria?" said the Chief, quietly, so that no one else could overhear him.

"She's fine," said the J.M.

"I want to check again on that line of cloud."

It was still there—no doubt of that. One of the ships reporting cloud today had reported cloud yesterday. She was a fast liner from Honolulu heading for San Francisco, and the cloud bank was moving at just about the same rate.

"Hn-n?" said the Chief. "You know, those passengers on that liner will think there's been cloud all over the ocean all this time. Not so bad though, as when a ship gets in slow-moving storm-center, and keeps in it maybe half way across the ocean. Well, have you figured out anything more?"

The J.M. felt a new uplift at being asked a question as though he were an equal.

"No," he said, regretfully but honestly. "We've got a whole line of ships reporting between here and Honolulu, but

they don't show enough wind- or temperature-shift anywhere to indicate a front. Whatever it is, it's only in the upper air.

"When would you say it'll get here, whatever it is?"

"Two or three tomorrow morning," said the J.M., but he did not say that he had used his slide-rule.

"Hm-n? worst time possible. In the afternoon it'll still be too far away for any good forecast, and it'll be on top of us before the morning forecast goes out. Maybe it's nothing, of course; and then again it may be a matter of a million dollars' damage and twenty lives. A plane with a good observer could fly out there in a few hours and find out what it's all about. Yet—" His voice was suddenly bitter. "If I asked the Navy for a plane, all the gold-braiders would laugh their heads off. But we have to take the responsibility of a forecast."

He bent over the map again, and studied it for any clue which might have so far escaped discovery.

The J.M. heard the door open and glanced around. He started with surprise. The Old Master was standing there, dripping wet. He looked pitifully small, draggled, and cold. His white hair straggled damply from beneath the sodden black felt hat. The light overcoat with the velvet collar clung to him, soaked. He was shivering.

The Chief looked up. "Lord!" he said sharply. And then both of them sprang to their feet. But the Old Master carefully shut the door behind him, and spoke in his outdated, formal way.

"Good morning, gentlemen. I thought that I should like to look at the map. My barometer has risen this morning, and I judged that the storm is over. I did not think it worth-while to carry an umbrella when I started out, and I am afraid I have been somewhat dampened by an unexpected shower."

The other two glanced at each other, and the Chief shook his head quickly.

"Here," he said. "Let me take your wet coat off. Sit by the radiator awhile, and dry your feet."

"Oh, no. I thank you, no. I shall just take a look at the map, and be on my way." He took his hat off out of politeness, but he only pulled his coat tighter about him as they started to take it. He walked toward the map, but a shiver took him, and he tottered.

"I'm afraid, sir," said the Chief, "you shouldn't trust a barometer too far. It's a wonderful instrument. But still—"

"Oh, yes, of course. Sometimes you get heavy rain with a rising barometer. I remember two such cases in ~~the~~ eighty-eighty-seven. Yes. I know, I know signs confirming, you can go with the barometer

The Chief steadied him by the right arm; the J.M. held him by the left; he leaned over and peered hard at the map. A drop of water fell from him right upon a 1008 isobar. The J.M. mopped it up with his handkerchief; the Old Master did not even notice. Probably he was seeing next to nothing. The Chief was trying to explain the map.

"You see," he said, "there's a lot more rain to come in." The Old Master shivered violently; he did not seem to notice what was being said. Then he pulled himself together and seemed to come out of the fog; he spoke clearly and stiffly.

"I thought that I should like to see the map again. I shall be going along now. I know—I *know*."

The Chief spoke hurriedly to the J.M. in a tense low voice: "Call the Navy Recruiting Office downstairs. *Somewhere*—get a doctor!"

4

Bright yellow in the winter sunshine, agleam with resplendent metal, the streamliner was making eighty miles an hour along the Platte River. Thin snow covered the land; in the channel the swift water ran black between the ice-fringes.

In the lounge-car two young men had joined with two older ones and were playing cards, listlessly. "One heart. . . two diamonds." Though it meant rubber, no one cared enough to put up a fight. When the points were added up, there was no suggestion of continuing.

"Are we on time?" asked one of the young men, just to be saying something.

"Were the last time I checked," said the second young man. "God, what a bore this trip is, even on the streamliner."

"Looks cold out there," said the first, gazing idly out the window at the bleak landscape.

"Plenty cold when we left Chicago—haven't stuck my nose out since, to tell the truth."

"Well, neither have I. Be good to get to California, and have a little decent weather."

"I hear they're having rain out there too."

"If there's one thing that bores me more than riding on a train," put in one of the older men, "it's discussing the weather. Riding on a train *and* discussing the weather is too much."

Between Norden and Emigrant Gap snow was falling at the rate of six inches an hour. A fast freight had to be side-tracked for twenty minutes until a rotary could punch through and clear the track, and then the freight had to follow a flanger, keeping one block behind.

The men piled out of the rotary, and fought their way to

the station-house. They were shaky in the legs from the unceasing vibration; they walked uncertainly. Their clothes were soaked with perspiration from the heat and steam, and they shivered in the cold, snow-driving wind. They grabbed themselves sandwiches and coffee; and standing with coats opened they tried to dry their clothing around the roaring, red-bellied coal stove.

Then orders come through. They plugged back to the rotary through the snow, and started out again. In this kind of storm the snow-equipment had to be kept moving. A fast train with mail was due through in a little while, and stopping a train like that was more serious than holding up a freight.

In the foothills rain was falling instead of snow. In ground well softened by the long downpour Blue Boy, the big bear, rooted in contentment. From his precipitous pasture above the railroad he looked down incuriously with his little eyes at a train passing below him. It had come down from the higher altitudes so fast that in spite of the heavy rain a little snow still clung to the tops of the cars. For a moment there was the roar of the locomotive and from the circular orifice of the smoke-stack thick blackness belched upward at the bear. Then came the click-click of passing mail-coaches and Pullmans. The noise faded off around a curve, and only the sound of a whistle came back faintly. The bear roared no, undisturbed.

5

In the early hours of morning the tropical air had arrived at the coast; by noon it covered all central California. While passing over the surface of the ocean it had produced only moderate rains along its advancing front where it overtook the cooler air ahead of it. But at the coast line the mountains forced it upward. Rising and cooling, the air released its stores of moisture. There were no displays of violence—no thunderstorms or wind-blasts. In the drops the rain fell almost quietly, but the downfall was unceasing and intense.

Mile by mile, swiftly, the tropical air moved inland. It crossed the Coast Ranges, and the air upon the long ridge-tops grew strangely mild. It moved over the Great Valley, but the air in that long trough was cool and heavy so that the tropical air moved across its top and nowhere touched the surface; but the rain which fell was not cold. Reaching the long westward slope of the Sierra the tropical air again rode upward, and the downfall was most intense of all. The snow-line lay about the three-thousand-foot level, but as the warmer air moved in, thick rain began to fall clear up to five thousand feet.

Some few days before, the Arctic had swept down across Texas; now as if in compensating reflux California became an outpost of the tropics. That air which swept the peaks and ridges had lain for weeks over the warm ocean. It had sucked its rain from the creamy foaming of lazy blue waves, from the spouting of whales, from the splashing of porpoises, sporting in the sea-trough. Its air had smoothed the plumage of gull and gony; it had laved the sides of leaping swordfish, and the backs of sleeping turtles awash in the long swells.

Over all of central California the tropical air was moving, but most intense was the precipitation in the foothills north-east of Sacramento, the basin of the American River. Five days of rainfall had saturated the earth, and now for every drop that fell another drop must somewhere pass into a stream and move rapidly downward toward the valley. Into the North Fork and the South Fork and the Middle Fork the water poured out from every side-canyon and gulch and gully. The North Fork of the North Fork came surging down. High up, the melting rain fell upon the snow which arched the East Fork and the Rubicon, and a thousand little streams which lay dormant in their snow-tunnels; beneath the insistent rain the snow grew soft and heavy; the arches fell and the water went foaming downward.

The streams poured out from all those creeks and canyons named by the Forty-Niners—in hope and despair and ridicule, now in flat matter-of-factness, now in flamboyant fancy. From Deer Creek and Otter Creek, from Bear Creek and Grizzly Creek, from Jaybird Creek and Redbird Creek. From Alder Creek and Willow Creek, and Lichen Creek, and Brush Creek; from Granite Creek and Slab Creek and Slate Creek. From Indian Creek and Dutch Creek and Irish Creek. From Pilot Creek and Whaler Creek, and Soldier Creek and Sailor Creek. From Iowa Creek and Missouri Creek. From New York Creek and Manhattan Creek, and Knickerbocker Creek and Hoboken Creek. From Dry Creek, no longer dry. From Lady Creek, and Widow Creek, and Secret Creek, which mask (men say) far ruder names. From Devil's Creek and Humbug Creek and Shirt-tail Creek; from Hangtown Creek and Robbers' Creek and One-eye Creek. Out of them all and a hundred more the water came foaming.

6

In the late afternoon the Superintendent stood again at the wide entry-way of the Maintenance Station, and looked out. Even here at the crest of the Pass there was only a steady, moderate wind, but the snowfall was thicker than it had yet been. It was more than ever like feather-down spilled from

"Well," he said, "I've got to see about takin' out some extra snow-stakes. There's gettin' to be a lot of places where the old ones are hardly showin' above the snow any more, and we'll have to splice new ones on their tops."

The foreman went off for the snow-stakes. The Superintendent got into his car, and drove down the east slope of the Pass to see how things looked.

The east face was to leeward, but around Windy Point was the usual swirling blizzard. Just below the Point he met a rotary. It was working up-grade on the inside of the road against the rock-wall, and was throwing its arc of snow across the highway and down the steep slope beyond. As he drew near, the rotary stopped throwing to let him drive by; he tooted lightly in salutation. He noted that the rotary was working heavily in very deep snow, over the top of the cutter-bar. A snow-nose must have just fallen off.

Around the Horse-shoe it was like a quiet nook, and the snow fell almost perpendicularly. At Rocky Point there was more wind again. Peering out through the windshield, the Superintendent could scarcely see anything, but by signs more than actual sight he knew that the snow-noses were many and were building far out. He could never exactly figure any logic to the ways of drifting snow. Against a telephone pole the snow always built out on the windward side. But at the crest of a cliff and along a cut in the road, it built out on the lee side. Farther and farther it would reach into space until the big blunt nose hung six or eight feet in the clear over the highway. Then eventually it grew too heavy and dropped, not doing any harm except to make a lot of mess for the plows to clean up. Some time, he supposed, a snow-nose would light on top of a car. Even so, it would probably not hurt anything, but it would certainly surprise the people in the car, and half scare them to death.

Below Rocky Point he met another rotary, also working up-grade on the inside. It seemed too close to the first one, but probably the operator was following orders from the foreman. Passing, the Superintendent leaned out, and caught a glimpse of big Peters in the rotary's cab.

He drove to the gates at the lake. Even at this slight distance to the east of the Sierra the snowfall was noticeably lighter. Beyond this point the rotaries were only needed occasionally, and a few miles farther was the open sage-brush country of Nevada which got hardly any snow at all.

As usual some drivers had come to this point without chains. A tow-car from a Truckee garage was standing by, like a vulture, waiting for people to get into trouble. The garage-man was putting chains on one car, but around an-

other car two men were working unskillfully in the snow while a woman now and then lowered the window-glass far enough to yell advice at them.

The Superintendent drove up the highway again. A big snow-nose had fallen, but it had left one lane still open. He passed the rotary, and tooted to Peters and Swenson. Just then he saw a tire-chain lying in the road; he stopped the car, and got out to pick up the chain so that it wouldn't get tangled up with the rotary.

Then—as he was walking back to his car—he heard it! It was unmistakable. He started to run for his car. The strange low hissing noise rose with a crescendo in pitch and intensity. Through the falling snow he could see nothing. Then as he ran, the whole roadway shook with some sudden impact; the hissing changed to a thudding. Like an advancing wave of water, a wave of snow came running along the highway. It pinned him against the side of his car, half-knocking his breath out.

In the next instant he found himself standing in three feet of snow. There was sudden quiet.

Pinned against the car, the Superintendent looked quickly to his right up the road; some twenty feet farther on, the wave of snow had come to a halt; for a moment with all the pressure of the mass behind, it had flowed madly, like a torrent of water; now it was only inert snow. He glanced hurriedly to his left, down the road. Where Peters and Swenson had been working with the rotary was now only a long unbroken slope of snow. The Superintendent wormed himself about, and got free. He saw that the snow behind his car was piled up too high for him to wallow through.

"Hey!" he shouted, cupping his hands in front of his mouth. "Peters! Swenson!"

He waited but there was no answer. Well, there was probably no need to worry. Things were bad, but they were most likely not nearly as bad as they looked. The road was not carried away. The slide had merely filled the roadway with snow, and swept on. On the outside edge of the road, the snow would be only a few feet deep; on the inside the depth might reach forty feet. Somewhere within that mass of snow was the rotary.

But the tough steel would withstand much more pressure than forty feet of snow could exert. Peters and Swenson were this moment undoubtedly still sitting inside the cab—white-faced probably, considerably surprised at their sudden entombment, perhaps still a little scared, but safe. Peters would already have had presence of mind enough to turn off the engine and prevent them from being asphyxiated. In

a moment they would collect themselves enough to begin discussing whether they would try to dig themselves out, or merely sit tight until they were rescued.

Thinking of how flabbergasted Peters and Swenson would be made the Superintendent realize that he himself was almost as much appalled. And yet these great slides from the heights could be expected a few times during every hard winter; he had just never happened previously to be present during the few seconds when one occurred; he had been within earshot often enough.

Collecting himself, he saw that his car was hopelessly buried in three feet of snow. He floundered ahead out of the deep snow, and then set out, half-running, up the road toward the next rotary. As he went, he already was planning. Lucky, he thought, this other rotary was so close; it could be working on that slide in ten minutes after he got to it. In three hours the road might be open again. He had other luck too. He met a car coming down, flagged it, told the driver of the snow-slide, turned him around, and saved ten minutes walking.

Right at Windy Point was the rotary. With a curt thank-you to the driver, the Superintendent jumped out, and then he realized that the rotary was not working. The operator and the swamper were peering beneath it from behind.

"Anything wrong?" shouted the Superintendent, with a sudden feeling of depression.

"We were gunning her hard into that big drift," said the operator in half-apology. "An axle went."

The Superintendent stopped in his tracks, figuring hard. One rotary buried, and another temporarily out. Three hours, six hours, eight hours. He would order out the whole night shift, and bring up another rotary. Eight hours. But if he threw all his remaining power against the snow-slide, the rest of the road would become impassable. Ten hours, then. Ten, or twelve.

His depression deepened to blackness. For three or four hours he could simply hold traffic at the gates; it would be merely a block, not a closed road. But twelve hours—that would even be in the papers. This rotary had been running for four days steadily; that was the chief difficulty. In the end, machines were like men; you could drive them just so hard and so long before they went to pieces.

But in this fight there was no surrender. He got the day-foreman on the radio and gave his orders. Rout out the night shift. Send down every man you can spare from the garage, even the mechanics. Order up another rotary. Stop traffic. Get in touch with the Highway Patrol. Call headquarters in Sacramento.

storm had been too much. It had worn down the men, and beaten even the machines.

7

Once the water had begun to spill over the weirs, the gauge-readings rose more slowly; but still they rose. People going out after breakfast to stand on Colusa Bridge saw the brown swirling water just a hair above twenty-one. At noon they looked, and said, "Twenty-one-point-six." By three o'clock the water was just below twenty-two. But the levees stood up high and firm on either side; the river would have to rise seven feet more, and touch twenty-nine to reach the danger-point, and even beyond that the levees, with luck, might stand a foot or two:

For every inch that the water rose at the gauge, another inch spilled over the weir. By mid-afternoon a depth of two feet was pouring over the quarter-mile length of Colusa Weir; that flow itself already equaled a large river. But from the other weirs also great streams poured out. Over Fremont the flow was twenty-inches deep and nearly two miles wide. Peering out through rain-slued windows, the people in cars crossing the long viaduct on U.S. 40 looked out to see Yolo By-Pass a mighty river three miles wide of swiftly flowing flood water.

Sacramento gauge, close to the point where the American flowed into the main stream, stood in early afternoon at twenty-one-point-five. It was rising slowly, but as at Colusa the city would not be endangered until the water rose seven and a half feet more, and touched twenty-nine. Before *that* happened, the weir-gates could be opened.

In the General's outer office three assistants had been kept busy all day. Each had a telephone, and all three lines were busy most of the time.

One of the assistants flipped the switch for the General's private telephone.

"Yes?" said the General from the inner office.

"Folsom reports seven-point-eight, up nine-tenths in an hour. I thought you'd like to know it right away."

"Yes, thanks. We're in for some trouble with the American, I think."

"And, General, Oroville wants you—Mr. L. D. Jackson. He wants you personally."

"Put him on," said the General with resignation. He had never heard of L. D. Jackson, but felt that he had been talking to him under different names and in different towns all day.

"Yes, General," said the long-distance operator. "And when you're through talking to Oroville, would you mind not

hanging up? I've three more long-distance calls waiting for you."

The General talked with Mr. Jackson, giving him information and reassurance. Then he talked to Red Bluff, Redding, and some ranch-house out of Marysville. It was the same story with slight variations; each man had his worries which in his own mind loomed larger than the possible flooding of all the rest of the valley.

Fortunately at this stage the General could usually quiet people's fears very quickly. The water was flowing over the weirs and flooding through the by-passes on a much greater scale but with the same simplicity that water spills from one basin of a fountain into the next. Everywhere the gauges stood several feet below the critical point. With the rain still continuing, there was no telling what height the flood crest would finally reach, but as yet the tremendous capacity of the by-passes was not even severely taxed.

So far, the damage reported had been only incidental and fortuitous. Two boys venturing out in a rowboat had lost their heads apparently, and overturned in the swirling channel; one of them had been drowned. A sudden outbreak of Stony Creek had swept away two hundred sheep. Seepage, caused probably by gophers working in the levee, was being fought near Meridian; local authorities reported the situation controlled. An incipient break in the Feather River levee had been discovered by a patrol before it had time to develop. The near-by ranchers had mobilized hastily. One of them donated some bales of hay, and these clogged the flow until a sand-bag defense could be built up.

"Hold up any more calls for me," said the General into his telephone. "Unless there's an emergency; I've got to do some figuring and get out a forecast."

The American was the immediate problem. Reports from the mountains indicated very heavy rain was falling everywhere in that basin. Even worse, it was a warm rain and was washing off the snow-cover up to the five-thousand-foot level. Every creek and gully flowing into each of the three forks must be a-boiling. And of all the rivers the American was the most flashy; because of its steeper gradient and shorter length, its waters crested quickly, and came out with a rush. With Folsom gauge rising so rapidly, the lower country would soon feel the effects; by latest report Sacramento gauge had risen to twenty-one-point-eight.

The General dictated: "The Feather, Yuba, and upper Sacramento Rivers are rising slowly, but gauge-readings are not excessive; flood levels are not to be expected within the next twenty-four hours. The amount of water flowing through the by-passes will increase moderately. The American River

is rising rapidly, and will reach twenty-five feet at Sacramento about midnight. This will necessitate closing the main highway between Sacramento and North Sacramento, and re-routing the traffic via Jib-boom Street."

The General settled back in his chair and looked at his desk-clock. That statement would go out immediately, and in about twenty minutes he could expect the Committee.

The Committee consisted of three business-men, a type of humanity for which the General as a military man had no liking. Two of them were tall and thin, but the chairman and the most aggressive was short and fat.

"General," he stated emphatically, "this has got to stop. When that road is closed, business in North Sacramento falls off fifty to a hundred thousand dollars *each day*. Sacramento clearing-house receipts fall off *five hundred thousand dollars—each day!*"

The man's overemphasis made the General think of a dog's barking; he disliked it intensely. Also, as a former officer he disliked being shouted at by a civilian. But he kept his temper.

"Look here," the man barked on, "if you open those gates at the twenty-five-foot gauge reading, that *road won't flood*. We represent the state *Businessmen's Association*, and we pay a lot of taxes. We're *about* ready to turn on the heat!"

In the long years since he had ceased being a junior officer the General had got out of the habit of keeping himself tightly reined in, but he still held on.

"Gentlemen," he said, "what happens to the delta farmers when those gates are opened?"

"They get flooded of course, but they take that chance. And there's not *half*—not a *quarter*—the loss of crops that there is loss of *business here.*"

The General reflected a moment, wanting to argue. Damage to land and crops was real to him, but as a military man he could never quite figure out the meaning of loss of business. Someone didn't spend money today because he didn't like to go out in the wet, but he must do something with the money some time. But that was not the point.

He put his last thought into words. "Gentlemen, that's not the point. There is the matter of an agreement. Possibly conditions have changed, and flooding the highway is more costly than flooding the farmers. That's still not the point—I hold the gates until I consider that the safety of the city is endangered."

The three men of the Committee looked at one another, and then got up. Last to go was that fat chairman. He turned around in the doorway.

"All right, *General*—" he barked. "And say, you don't by

What's that isolated line of cloud coming here of
re?" he asked.
"Can't make out exactly," said the meteorologist. "Some-
thing of upper-air front. It's been moving in closer for the last
couple of days. We're watching it."
"You'd better!" said the CSO shortly. He checked the
latest weather reports from the air-planes. There was no im-
portant change.

He passed into the dispatching-room, and checked the re-
ports of progress which had been radioed in from the various
planes. There was nothing of note.

He went back to his office. There he snarled malignantly
at a stenographer who came in with letters. He knew that he
was merely relieving his own nerves, but he did not apologize.
Being rude to the stenographer was only a way of keeping
himself from settling down into complacency.

"Act of God!" he thought cynically to himself, returning
to that early religious training, now long perverted. "Fire
and hail, snow and vapors, stormy wind fulfilling his word!"
He checked over his old enemies wondering which was getting
ready to strike next. "The Prince of the power of the air!"
Yes, he too was working somewhere at his subtle sabotage—
making pilots overconfident and careless, crossing the wrong
wires in men's minds, causing meteorologists to be unobserv-
ant, lulling dispatchers into negligence.

In a few minutes now his assistant would be coming on
and taking charge for the night. He felt that he should pass
on some warning, but there was really nothing which he
could transmit except perhaps his own nervousness, and that
in itself would be misleading.

9

The first outfit that got to the snow-slide was the V-plow
with eight men of the night shift hanging on to it. First of all
they took in a chain, and hooked it around the front axle
of the Superintendent's car. With the other end attached to
the plow they yanked the car out of three feet of snow be-
hind the main force. Then the V-plow drove right on into the slide.
It went ahead easily as far as the snow had just run up the
road, but when it hit the main part of the slide, where the
snow was many feet deep, the plow shoved ahead and made
a hole in the snow, and the V-plow could do nothing more.

Next a push-plow came up. It widened the narrow track
of the V-plow, and then barged around, pushing the snow
lower snow back in various places. While it was working
some of the men got their webs on, and climbed up on the
slide; they had to move gingerly for fear their weight might
start the whole slide again and take them down into

anyone. When the lights of a rotary showed up around the turn, the push-plow went off to work on the road somewhere else; it would be no more use for a while at the slide.

The rotary headed in as far as the push-plow had opened up the way, and then started work. The men gave a little cheer as it began flinging snow; for now they were really getting somewhere. The operator had set the augers so that the rotary climbed up on the snow a little as it advanced. But even so, as soon as the rotary got to the main part of the slide, the snow was high over the tops of the cutter-bars. The rotary ate its way ahead until soon it had dug out a cave for itself and the blower had no place to throw the snow. Then the operator backed it out, and began shaving up the edges, and the men with shovels on top of the slide tumbled down great masses of snow, especially from the mouth of the snow cave. As soon as there was enough to work on, the rotary waded in again and threw it all over the side. But the advance was slow.

The Superintendent's job was to direct the fight, and mostly he was busy, plunging around through the snow, telling the operator where to head the rotary in, directing the men on top of the slide and warning them to be careful. Once he went back a little way to get a look at the whole set-up, and it was something of a sight to see. Darkness had come on, and the snow was falling as fast as ever. The lights from all the plows and cars that were there were playing on the slide. The men on top looked small and black as ants by contrast with the great white heap. The rotary was throwing its great arc. And all around, the flying snow reflected back the lights, and shut off the little scene of activity from all the world outside.

He had time then to figure out just what had happened. High on the cliffs a big overhanging snow-nose had got too heavy and dropped off. It lit on the loose snow which had just fallen, and below that snow would be the surface of the old snow which had fallen in November and grown slick and hard and icy by melting a little in the sun each day and freezing up at night. The new snow had started moving, not rolling like a snow-ball, but sliding along the slick surface below. It picked up speed and grew as it went. Now it would override the snow ahead, and now it would shove beneath and carry it along. There was nothing to stop it, for this was an old track where the snow had been sliding for centuries. No trees could grow there long enough to get big, and all opposing rocks had long since been carried away. So the slide was probably nothing but snow—and that would be lucky for the two men inside the buried rotary.

high against the banks, and the clambeds flooded. Sometimes when the people went to fish, they found wide mud-flats where they had expected to spear salmon.

At first the people attempted no explanation. After many generations they came to realize that a river-god, capricious and sometimes malignant, was responsible for this rise and fall. They placated the god by throwing flowers and food into the water, and now and then (when famine came) a baby.

After further generations a wise man arose among the people. He showed them how to outwit the river-god, who was really stupid, or else subordinate to the sun-god. For, observing the time of high water by the position of the sun, you could return next day when the sun was in the same position, and find the water high again. The priests were horrified, and had the man stoned to death for impiety, but the people found his ideas useful.

Throughout further centuries the knowledge of the tides increased. It was learned that they followed the moon more than the sun, that they were greater toward the north, that even the vagaries of spring- and neap-tides accorded to rule. Finally the people, having developed mathematics and printing, published tables showing for a year in advance the height and time of every tide. Local influences such as wind and rain still produced a little variation, but the tide was no longer mysterious, and fearful; it was wholly understood.

As is the tide, so is the weather; the atmosphere, like the ocean, moves under physical laws. But the atmosphere is more mobile, so that the forces seriously affecting it are more numerous. All its motions arise from the heat of the sun, but this simplicity lies obscured beneath complications. Gravity, inertia, electricity, the spherical shape of the earth, its rotation, the ocean-currents, the contrasts between water and land and between desert and forest, the height of mountains, the compressibility of air, the almost explosive qualities of water-vapor—these and other forces combine to produce the weather.

Man is now able to make approximate short-range forecasts. He has reached about as far as the people who estimated tides by the sun. But many of the forces of weather-control have already been stated with mathematical exactitude. The way of progress lies ahead, wide and open. A century hence, Siberia and Patagonia alike, Arctic and Antarctic, the islands of the sea and the ships that cross the sea, may all report to one great bureau. Then the published tables of next year's weather may be as accurate as the published tables of next year's tides.

Only man's quarrelsomeness seems likely to prevent this

assumption. To master and apply the laws of the air without a world-wide co-operation is like trying to predict events with an imperfect knowledge of the motions of sun and moon.

If the final success is attained, what will be the effect upon man? Will he at last have to stop talking and speculating about the weather? Will the foreknowledge that he must prepare against a tornado upon a given day be more strain than grasshopper-like ignorance and sudden disaster? Will the removal of the daily mystery only serve perhaps to make life at once safer and more boring?

2

The "brave west winds" again were blowing. Across the continent from the Gulf of Alaska to the Atlantic, the linked storms closed their front against the north. As yet the eastward-moving current was weak, and its course was sinuous. Here it ran far to the north; here swinging to the south, it even eddied back westward. But still the final movement was from west to east. No longer did the polar air reach out deep toward the tropic. The forces of the south had restored their line of battle.

During six days and nights the Canadian plains had been an extension of the Arctic—ever since the morning when the blizzard had swept down from the north.

The blizzard had ceased after a few hours; then the clouds vanished, and the air grew still. But that stillness lay like death upon the land. Day by day, a brassy sun swung in a long arc through the southern sky, but it gave little warmth; at noon the stretched-out shadows lay blue across the snow. Night by night, a waxing moon rode bright in the sky; not even a wisp of high cirrus blanketed the earth; the heat radiated off far toward the cold stars.

In the dawn, steam rose visibly from the stables where the blanketed horses huddled. From the chimneys of lonely ranch-houses smoke rose straight and high until at last it bulged out like some great unnatural mushroom. On the range, cattle pawed and nuzzled through the crusty snow to reach the dried grass; their legs were scraped and bleeding; bloody icicles hung at their nostrils. They must keep to their feet; for, if they lay down, they froze to the ground. As, moaning, they huddled together for warmth, mist from the moisture and warmth of their breathing hung over them in the still air as mist hangs over a pool. (But far over the Pacific the air was moving.)

By mid-week, people had only one thought and one salutation: "Will the chinook never come!"

Then, late Thursday afternoon, there was a change. The temperature rose somewhat, and the Weather Bureau at Edmonton reported only seventeen below zero. At sunset, when looking southwest saw a long, unbroken bank of cloud, low-hanging over the mountains. Its lower edge resting on the ridges was dark and heavy, and straight as a line drawn with a ruler; the upper edge was broken and wind-whipped, and cast up the sunset in red-gold. "She's coming!" men said, and were loosed from fear.

Just after midnight the mild, dry southwester—the chinook wind—swept across the plains. At the Weather Bureau the thermograph showed a rise of thirty-three degrees—from thirteen below zero to twenty above—in ten minutes. To people waking in the night the air was soft and warm like a breeze of springtime. "The chinook!" they said. "Thank God!"

Pious people were well within their rights to thank God for the chinook, although (to be consistent) they should also have rendered thanks every morning for the rising of the sun. For, equally, the chinook and the sunrise were the result of natural processes. A week earlier the cold wave in Alberta had been associated with an approaching storm in California, not as cause and effect, but merely as the two parts of a broken cup fit perfectly, being really one. Now, in the same way, the long continuance of the storm matched the coming of the chinook.

Nevertheless, the mild and dry air now melting the snow upon the plains had a history during the past week which even by atmospheric standards was an Odyssey. On the preceding Friday, as frigid and dry polar air, it had moved from the frozen Arctic Ocean over the region of tundra west of Coppermine. On Saturday, grown even colder, it was moving west along the Yukon Valley. On Sunday, maintaining its speed of nearly eight hundred miles in twenty-four hours, it crossed the mountains of southern Alaska, became warmer and drier because of its descent, and moved southward in the region of Kodiak Island. On Monday it thrust south far to the Pacific as part of the western discharge of the polar air. Over the ocean it was growing rapidly warmer and moist. On Tuesday it felt the pull of the storm-centred over the California coast and swung toward the southwest. On Wednesday the same storm brought it northeast at about the latitude of San Francisco; flung upward by the mountains it discharged its newly gained moisture as rain and snow. On Thursday, it was again dry and moderately cold. Still in the orbit of the storm, it was being driven rapidly as a severe wind, dry and below freezing, across the plateau of eastern Washington; by the late afternoon

reaching through and over the mountains of British Columbia. At this point, because of the pressure systems which were being built up, the old storm center was no longer able to hold it, and the air moved northeastward in the control of another storm just developing farther north.

Even on the mountain tops the air had been dry and only moderately cold. Descending, it had grown much warmer and drier. By daybreak temperatures from Edmonton to Regina were well above freezing. The snow had almost vanished; wide pools of water stood in the fields. Yet the streams did not rise greatly; the warm dry air sucked up the water almost as rapidly as the snow melted, and in many places evaporated the snow even before it could change to liquid. Over all the wide prairie, the saving chinook had broken the deadly grip of the north.

3

As a minor detail of the vast complex of storm, the pocket of old polar air which had intruded itself into the tropical air had continued to move toward the California coast. It was only a few hundred miles in diameter; nevertheless, it possessed almost explosive potentialities. It was warm and moist below and extremely cold and dry above. If anything contrived to force the lower layer upward, this air would cool as it rose, but still would remain warmer than the air of any particular level at which it arrived. It would therefore continue to rise more and more rapidly.

The first of the old polar air to reach the coast was a narrow wedge which lay beneath the last of the warm tropical air and so was prevented from rising. About three hours before daybreak, however, the full depth of old polar air arrived, and mountains of the Coast Range cast the lower level upward; immediately, as if a match had been touched to shavings soaked in gasoline, the reaction within the air itself became spontaneous. Great towers of cumulus cloud, miles in circumference, ascended higher and higher, billowing outward. From this rising air the rain, hard-drumming in great drops, poured in cloudburst torrents. But here and there the upper current was so strong that it carried the falling rain aloft and swirled it about until the drops froze and at last fell as hail. Close to the ground the air was sucked in violently, as toward a vacuum, to fill in behind the rising air; the sudden wind-flaws drove the rain before them, and snapped branches from trees. The disturbed electrical balance readjusted itself in stabs of lightning; thunder boomed above the roar of the wind and rain.

With the staccato rattle of drums sounding an alarm, the

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Just after midnight the mild, dry southwester—the chinook wind—swept across the plains. At the Weather Bureau the thermograph showed a rise of thirty-three degrees—from thirteen below zero to twenty above—in ten minutes. To people waking in the night the air was soft and warm like a breeze of springtime. "The chinook!" they said. "Thank God!"

Pious people were well within their rights to thank God for the chinook, although (to be consistent) they should also have rendered thanks every morning for the rising of the sun. For, equally, the chinook and the sunrise were the result of natural processes. A week earlier the cold wave in Alberta had been associated with an approaching storm in California, not as cause and effect, but merely as the two parts of a broken cup fit perfectly, being really one. Now, in the same way, the long continuance of the storm matched the coming of the chinook.

Nevertheless, the mild and dry air now melting the snow upon the plains had a history during the past week which even by atmospheric standards was an Odyssey. On the preceding Friday, as frigid and dry polar air, it had moved from the frozen Arctic Ocean over the region of tundra west of Coppermine. On Saturday, grown even colder, it was moving west along the Yukon Valley. On Sunday, maintaining its speed of nearly eight hundred miles in twenty-four hours, it crossed the mountains of southern Alaska, became warmer and drier because of its descent, and moved southward in the region of Kodiak Island. On Monday it thrust south far into the Pacific as part of the western discharge of the polar air, over the ocean it was growing rapidly warmer and more moist. On Tuesday it felt the pull of the storm-center off the California coast and swung toward the southwest. On Wednesday the same storm brought it northeast at about the latitude of San Francisco; flung upward by the mountains, it discharged its newly gained moisture as rain and snow. On Thursday, it was again dry and moderate; still within the orbit of the storm, it was being driven northward as a severe wind, dry and below freezing, across the high plateau of eastern Washington; by Friday noon it was

reaching through and over the mountains of British Columbia. At this point, because of the pressure systems which were being built up, the old storm center was no longer able to hold it, and the air moved northeastward in the control of another storm just developing farther north.

Even on the mountain tops the air had been dry and only moderately cold. Descending, it had grown much warmer and drier. By daybreak temperatures from Edmonton to Regina were well above freezing. The snow had almost vanished; wide pools of water stood in the fields. Yet the streams did not rise greatly; the warm dry air sucked up the water almost as rapidly as the snow melted, and in many places evaporated the snow even before it could change to liquid. Over all the wide prairie, the saving chinook had broken the deadly grip of the north.

3

As a minor detail of the vast complex of storm, the pocket of old polar air which had intruded itself into the tropical air had continued to move toward the California coast. It was only a few hundred miles in diameter; nevertheless, it possessed almost explosive potentialities. It was warm and moist below and extremely cold and dry above. If anything contrived to force the lower layer upward, this air would cool as it rose, but still would remain warmer than the air of any particular level at which it arrived. It would therefore continue to rise more and more rapidly.

The first of the old polar air to reach the coast was a narrow wedge which lay beneath the last of the warm tropical air and so was prevented from rising. About three hours before daybreak, however, the full depth of old polar air arrived, and mountains of the Coast Range cast the lower level upward; immediately, as if a match had been touched to havings soaked in gasoline, the reaction within the air itself became spontaneous. Great towers of cumulus cloud rose in circumference, ascended higher and higher, blowing outward. From this rising air the rain, hard-driving to great tops, poured in cloudburst torrents. But here and there the upper current was so strong that it carried the falling rain off and swirled it about until the drops froze and fell as hail. Close to the ground the air was sucked in violently, as toward a vacuum, to fill in behind the moving air. The sudden wind-flaws drove the rain before them and swept down branches from trees. The chambered cannon thunder adjusted itself in stabs of lightning flashes to the roar of the wind and rain.

With the staccato rattle of ~~drumming~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~air~~

heavy drops beat upon thousands of windows. Shades flapped, curtains bellied out, water spattered upon floors. Thousands of people woke from the death-like sleep which comes before the dawn. Still drugged with oblivion, men staggered to close half-opened windows. Mothers hurried to look at their babies. Children screamed in fright at the sudden uproar. (As thousands of lights were snapped on, the operator at French Bar Power-House, two hundred miles away, spun his handle and let more water pass through the turbines to meet the sudden demand for current.)

The General Manager awoke. He thought of his thousands of miles of rails gleaming wet in the night, of the waters running in the ditches beside the tracks, of the culverts and the bridges. He remembered the streamliner, somewhere out in Nevada, coming fast. He thought also of the men and the safety devices, of the snow-plows at work, of the red and green lights shining through falling rain and snow. He had confidence, and went back to sleep.

Jen's sister awoke, and went to look at her babies. As she heard the beating rain, she shivered and caught her breath in a sob. She felt her little sister out there somewhere, lying in the rain, or wandering lost, calling to her. For the hundredth hopeless time she called the office of the Highway Patrol. No news. Shivering, she went to bed; and did not sleep again.

The Chief Service Officer did not quite awake. (He was worn out with a hard week, and all the responsibility of when to let his planes go, when to keep them grounded.) He tossed about as the drumming of the rain beat its warning in through layer after layer of sleep. But his subconscious mind rejected the call of duty which, waking, he would have assumed. It tricked him, and in dream he seemed only to be watching a parade. The rattle of the hail became the *ta-ratta-ta-tat* of snare drums, and the distant thunder was only the sounding of the great horns. He did not leap to the telephone with a word of warning and advice to his less experienced assistant at the airport. Instead, half-awaking, he imagined comfortably that it was merely a dream and fell into another sound sleep.

The L.D. awoke. "Sounds like trouble," he thought. He remembered his wires and his poles, his dams and his ditches. But he had confidence in his men, and went back to sleep.

The District Traffic Superintendent awoke. He took down the telephone from the head of his bed, and talked with the office. "Just a local cloudburst," said his assistant. "No trouble yet on the long lines." The DTS went back to sleep.

The Chief awoke. He looked at the clock. "Hn-n?" he thought. "That was it!" Then, since there would be no use

in getting to the Bureau before the reports came in, he rolled over for another cat-nap before getting up.

As it approached land, the old polar air had had a breadth of several hundred miles, bulging forward near the center. This center touched the coast first near San Francisco, and the violence of the action at that point was such that it pulled the air in from the north and south. The moving front of heavy rain and piled-up clouds thus shrank in breadth and became correspondingly more intense. It swept across San Francisco Bay, deluged the hill country and sluiced down its rain upon the delta. Rushing northeast across the Great Valley it struck Sacramento.

The General awoke to full consciousness all at once. The rain crashed against the closed window like something solid. He called his office, where one assistant worked through the night.

"When did this get here?" he demanded.

"Just now, sir. But I knew it was coming. It hit the delta half an hour ago, and I've had a dozen long-distance calls already."

"Any trouble?"

"Nothing—yet."

"I'll be right down."

Dressing, he looked at his watch; the hands pointed at four-twenty-six.

"Big Al" Brunton, the pilot, was checking over the trip forecast with the dispatcher at the Salt Lake City airport. It was five-twenty-nine (Mountain Time), and he was taking out the big sleeper-plane, non-stop, to San Francisco, a four-hour flight, better than six hundred miles. Either Al or the dispatcher, not liking the weather conditions, could cancel the trip. But it was hard even to think of canceling when conditions at Salt Lake City were perfect for flying. The forecast indicated that the same conditions would hold almost to Reno. Farther on, the storm was continuing.

"The five A.M. reports," said the dispatcher, "don't show anything very bad over the Hump. It's tropical air—stable. Trip six-eight flew it, and just went through between cloud levels. The Bay has been having violent showers, but that's very local—as yet anyway."

"Let's get started," said Big Al.

"If we have to ground you at Reno, all right. But I think the chances are pretty good you can go all the way through."

Big Al walked out to the plane. The night was snappy cold, not much above zero. Only a slight drift of air was moving up from the south. The sky was a wide arch of stars,

glittering bright through the desert air. Far to the west, ahead, a full moon was low in the sky. Back eastward, over the mountains, was just a hint of the coming dawn. On a night like this the idea of storm was unreal. Big Al could hardly bring himself to believe that within five hundred miles he might be ordered down.

He settled himself at the controls; trying not to bump his sleeping passengers more than was necessary, he took off. Gaining altitude he swung around and headed west: the beam was a dull steady buzz in his ears. He leveled off as soon as he had reached safe flying height, for if he went higher he would meet heavier headwinds. He settled to cruising speed. Ahead he saw the moon. As always he felt that he was racing the moon, even overtaking it. Actually, he knew, the plane was making about one-hundred-eighty miles an hour, the moon at this latitude roughly seven hundred. He could not even keep the moon in sight. And even faster, the sun was racing up behind him. Tonight the moon would not set, but would be caught in the open; and somewhere over Nevada he would watch it grow dim ingloriously before the rays of the sun.

As the plane rose higher and the never-freezing waters of Great Salt Lake lay beneath, the streamliner pulled out of Reno. After two thousand miles it was still on time to the second. In the sleeping-cars the corridors were dim. Most of the passengers were asleep; those who had awakened because of the stop at Reno were settling down again. The bar was closed; shining chromium and crimson leather, the lounge-car was empty except for a dozing trainman.

The wheel-clicks came faster as the train picked up speed. Like the bay of some huge unearthly hound, the horn sounded through the night. A swaying and creaking of the cars let even a man lying in his berth know that the train was pulling up-grade.

On the crests ahead, thick clouds hung low, but overhead broken clouds slid across the sky. The moon shone between, gleaming upon scanty desert snow. The clumps of sage-brush were snow-encrusted; in the moonlight they glittered like wedding-cake ornaments.

Ahead of the streamliner, red lights winked into the green. Fifty miles farther on, a rotary snow-plow pulled out of Norden yards to get the track clear; a flanger crew was making ready to follow. Track-walkers dragged themselves out of sleep, and set out to patrol their sections. The crack train of the run must go through on time.

The wheels ground on a curve; the streamliner, a few

miles out of Reno, was entering Truckee Canyon. In San Francisco the Chief was drawing the last of his isobars.

Against the blank darkness of the windows the rain was a continuous crash, varying only as some gust raised it to a crescendo and then let it fall off a little. The Chief was working with a half-smile on his lips. With that beat of rain against the windows it seemed silly to think that the storm was over. Yet he had already in his mind worded his forecast: "Heavy showers, then clearing." By the time the average citizen sat down to breakfast and, picking up his paper, looked for the weather-report, the rain would already have ceased; very likely the sun would be shining.

Yet the Chief was not dabbling in astrology or staring at a crystal; the forecast lay all upon the map, clear for anyone to read. Off-shore about a hundred miles, sharply defined by ship-reports, he had drawn a blue line marking a cold front. Eastward of that boundary line as it advanced toward the coast was falling pressure, warm moist air, and a southwest gale; behind it was rising pressure and cooler air borne in on the northwest wind. That front with a sharp wind-shift line of more than ninety degrees, would cause plenty of disturbance as it passed over California, but it would be the storm's last kick.

He called the J.M. over for a look. "Well," said the Chief, "your friend Maria is about done for." East and west, like hostile forces, areas of high pressure had developed and were pressing in. To the south, the Pacific High showed again. Northward, Victoria had drawn close, taking to herself the northern air which had been feeding Maria. At the center, the pressure was rising rapidly.

"What about this?" asked the J.M., motioning with his head toward the windows where the storm still beat.

"Pretty local. Fresno, you see, reports only a drizzle."

"Well, Maria was a good one, while she lasted."

"Don't speak of her in the past, quite yet. Wait till that front goes by. Say, have you called the hospital?"

Racing on from Sacramento, northeastward, at forty-five miles an hour, the front of the advancing old polar air met the line of the foothills shortly before six o'clock. The steady rise of the slope forced the air still upward, and threw it into even wilder confusion.

Blue Boy, the boar, awoke and grunted in displeasure. His thick covert of oak was good against most rains, but not against this one. He stirred resentfully, bringing to life some vague boar-memories of a warm dry shed. Then he settled down, trying to make himself more comfortable.

Johnny Martley awoke. His house was near one end of French Bar dam, and close to the lip of the canyon. The

house was of wood, solidly constructed, company-built. He could feel the tough timbers give before the wind-pressure; he heard the crash of the rain. "Cloudburst," he said to his wife. "Rain (hear it?)—not snow. There'll be a lot of water down the North Fork."

(Rick, the lineman, did not awake. In the little mountain town where he had been born, he lay quietly in his coffin.)

It was just after six when the J.M. talked to the nurse on the ward. He reported to the Chief.

"She says the Old Master is pretty bad—that chill, or something; got his heart."

"Hn-n?" said the Chief. "He's ninety if he's a day."

Just after six also the radio operator at Bay Airport talked with the plane over Elko. There was some crackling of static, but the words came through clearly. Big Al Brunton was flying smoothly through the calm high-pressure area which stretched across most of Nevada. The radio-operator gave the information which the Night Service Officer had ordered. "Conditions over the summit, still flyable, but be ready for orders to land at Reno. Worse on this side of the summit—considerable turbulence. Cumulus cloud masses rising to an undetermined height, probably some icing conditions at certain levels as previously reported. Airports available: Reno open; Sacramento doubtful; Bay open, and conditions expected to improve after passage of a cold front about seven A.M.; Red Bluff doubtful; Fresno open and expected to remain so, available for emergency landing."

In the gray of the morning Al picked up the Reno beam, and turned the plane to its new course.

In the first dim light of dawn the cloudburst was unloosed over all the tangled foothill country of gully and ravine and deep-cut canyon where rise the feeders of the American. Under the covert of pine and live-oak and manzanita millions of oozing trickles converged and grew larger. Muddy streams ran brawling; over rock ledges they poured in waterfalls. The steep slope of each canyon-side shed water like a roof. Gulches and gullies converged into ravines; the water foamed downward in torrents. Creeks flowed like forks, and forks like rivers.

At Yankee Jim's two inches of rain fell in ten minutes. Brushy Creek was rolling boulders. From Shirttail Canyon the waters gushed out in a wave three feet high. The rise of the North Fork was so sudden that for a moment it backed up into the Middle Fork. Weber Creek took out two bridges. The South Fork went over the flats at Coloma. And on Fol-

som gauge where the united river swept out into the plain the red-brown water already swirled close to flood-level.

Flanges grinding, coaches swaying on the curves, the streamliner pulled up the steep grade toward the summit. No longer could it race at eighty miles an hour; such speed was for the plains; here, laboring tortuously up the pass, its rate was cut in half. On both sides of the track the piled-up snow was deep.

At every block-tower the green lights glowed through the gray of the dawn. Snow-encrusted track-walkers—their patrols just finished ahead of the streamliner—stood by the side of the track, and waved salutation.

Passengers were waking up—hearts pounding a little, eardrums tight, from the sharp increase in altitude. Here and there a head popped out from between the curtains.

"Are we on time, porter?"

"Dis train *ah-ways* on time, suh!"

The two young men—early risers—were shaving. "Looks like a lot of snow out there," said one of them, trying to see through the corrugated glass of the dressing room.

"Don't worry. They may have to hold up the freights and the locals, but 'the streamliner goes through on time.' I'm quoting that pamphlet again."

The General's office was not so much of a mad-house as he had feared. Even before he had the reports from the Weather Bureau, he could tell that the cloudburst which had swept across Sacramento had not been very widespread; the long-distance calls plotted its course and extent almost exactly.

Except for the partially protected lands in the delta, the General was still optimistic. The timing and distribution of rainfall was such that the rivers would reach their hours of greatest discharge in regular order, one crest passing on before the next arrived. First of all would come the American next the Yuba, then the Feather, and only after these were well out of the way would the full flow of the upper Sacramento arrive in the lower river. All this was assuming that the forecast of clearing weather was accurate.

The American was the immediate and worst prospect. By the latest report Sacramento gauge was at twenty-five feet nine and still rising. Already the red-brown water covered U. S. 40 between the bridge and North Sacramento. The Committee had loosed its pressure through the newspapers. And on the other side a sheaf of telegrams from the farmers in the delta lands lay in one of the baskets on the desk.

The General set his jaw, and signed orders for the reports which were already in. The flooding of the delta was

dismissed from his thoughts. The balance was between the delta and the city. He decided he still had an outside chance of saving the delta without running too grave a risk for the city. If the Yuba crested as slowly as now seemed likely, and if the cloudburst conditions over the near-by foothills were not quite as bad as reports indicated, then he might—just possibly—squeeze through without opening the weir-gates. But if the gauge-reading at Sacramento crept up to twenty-eight-five, and on toward twenty-nine, he must act; for with the water slopping at the levee-top any unforeseen gust of wind might mean disaster to the city. For the moment he could only wait.

The telephone bell rang. His secretary was speaking. "Sacramento gauge at twenty-six-point-one."

That will put the water over the tops of the wickets, thought the General. Up two tenths in an hour! We can't stand *that* very long.

He again made some calculations. With water spilling through the weir the rate of rise against the levees would be cut down. But he thought of the cloudburst over the foothill country and of the water which was already pouring down the American. He shook his head.

The J.M. climbed to the roof, and picked his way among the skylights and ventilators. The wind gusts made him stagger. It was full day now, but the thick sweeping rain and low hard-driven clouds made the light dim.

"Go up and take a look at it," the Chief had said. "A well-defined cold front coming in from the Pacific is something to see."

The violence of the storm increased. The wind was hard from the south; the rain was thick before his eyes. In spite of the wind and rain he felt no sense of chill.

Then in a moment the wind seemed suddenly to come from all directions at once. He staggered this way and that against it. A few handfuls of hail rattled on the skylights. From far off came a boom of thunder.

And now the wind was a buffeting flaw from the west. Huge drops flying level, spattered in his face. Just as suddenly, there was no rain, and he was cold. Another windshift threw him off balance, and he caught himself with one hand against the parapet. The wind had veered forty-five degrees more and was a cold blast from the northwest.

The rain came again. A chilling shower, hard blown, but with smaller drops. He shivered beneath his oilskin. After a minute the shower was gone. For another minute the storm seemed more threatening than ever. Low-flying scud swept the tops of the higher buildings around him. The wind backed

gustily from northwest to west, and then veered to northwest again.

All at once he was conscious that he could see better. From somewhere there was more light. The cloud-deck was higher and more sharply defined; beneath it he saw the bases of the hills five miles to the north.

As neatly as if someone drew curtains aside, a hole opened in the cloud-deck just above him and a patch of pure blue sky showed through for a moment. The clouds rolled over it again, but at the same time he saw another patch of blue to the west and a much larger one to the north.

Then another shower of cold rain enveloped him and clouds were close around. But the insistent northwest wind seemed dry even as it was driving the raindrops before it. The wind did not change; the shower lasted perhaps two minutes. Then it was gone into nowhere as quickly and unexpectedly as it had come.

Now he did not have to glance rapidly here and there to see bits of blue sky. Over all the north and west the clouds were broken. The dark low-hanging remnants of the stratus-deck changed while he looked at them. They contracted and piled up; the edges took on a touch of white fluffiness. High up they reflected a gleam of sunlight.

He looked eastward. Over the Bay he saw the slanting lines of two rain-squalls; the Berkeley Hills were still veiled in cloud, which rose high enough to shut out the rays of the morning sun. But now even at the zenith blue sky was showing.

He looked at his watch—only fifteen minutes. But he felt as if he had passed from one world into another. Already the wind was licking up the water, and dry spots showed on the tiles of the roof-floor. Now he could make out, clear across the Bay, the white shaft of the tower on the University campus. Any moment now the sun would shine over the top of the cloud bank, fast receding to the east.

His fingers were numb, and his damp feet were like ice-blocks in the chilling sweep of the northern air; but he felt a fine sense of exhilaration. The shock of dropping humidity and the rising pressure gave a sharp stimulus to his body and mind. He indulged in a vigorous, awkward tap-dance which served to get the circulation started in his feet again.

Then the sun came out, and he was suddenly too warm. He stripped off his now dry slicker. The northwest wind was still chilly, but it seemed to generate an excess energy which made the chilliness pleasant. He wanted to take a long walk on some wind-blown hill.

Reluctantly he turned to get back to work. The front was only a low blur of cloud on the horizon of the upper bay.

and shone brightly in a clean blue sky, scattered with high-piled masses of white cloud. The northwest wind possessed the city.

The Chief Service Officer, backing his car from the apartment-house garage, stuck his head out the window and looked toward the rear to see where he was steering. Thus he caught the whiff of the northwest wind full in his face. He felt assured; more than any other phenomenon of the atmosphere, he was inclined to trust that particular wind. To him it meant stable air flowing steadily, not likely to shift without warning.

But as he drove toward the airport, he felt his usual wariness returning. The front must have passed by; off to the northeast he could make out what was probably the last of the vanishing rain; the air was still full of big but harmless-looking clouds.

He began to notice evidences that the last flick of the storm had been even more severe than he had realized. The sun was shining, but while he had been asleep something might have been happening. Here was a small branch blown from a tree and lying still in the street; a newly planted sapling had broken its stake, and now flopped over in a helpless curve; a telephone gang was repairing wire. Of course a cold front must have passed in, and its attendant line-squall would be enough to account for all this. But where was that cold front now, how violent was it, and were any planes in its path? Unconsciously, he began to drive faster. He noticed that little deltas of sand and gravel lay on the pavement at street-corners and driveways. "Act of God!" he thought viciously, and at the thought stepped hard on the accelerator.

Overcoat still flapping about him, he strode into the dispatching room at the airport. "What's happening?" he snapped at the meteorologist.

"A little patch of unstable air from somewhere—does show up well on the map—too small. Seven o'clock report showed she hadn't got to the summit yet. Weather-bureau reports at four showed a lot of local thunderstorms, and

"Thunderstorms!"

The CSO turned on his heel, and made for the radio-just across the hall. At the doorway he met his assistant, reading the face he did not waste time on salutations.

"What's the matter?"

"Trip one-sixty-five. The air went bad over the summit at once. I was going to order it down at Reno, and sure we can't make contact. Some electrical disturbance blocking everything out—nothing but static."

The assistant said other things, but the CSO did not

He concentrated on the problem for a moment with such violence that perspiration broke out upon him. No solution! "Keep on trying," he said to the radio-operator.

He took off his overcoat and sat down to wait limply for news, hoping it would not be too long delayed or too bad. Deep and bitter cynicism smoldered inside him. Years of accumulating experience, hundreds of men, scientific experiment, unfailing vigilance, instruments of precision, teletype circuits, radio beacons, beams, emergency landing-fields—and yet the air could still pull off a trick like this! And what had you left? Only a plane and a pilot in wild air over the mountains.

"*Fire and hail,*" he thought. "*Snow and vapors, stormy wind fulfilling his word. Well—*"

He lighted a cigarette, and his hand did not shake—not even when the telephone rang. Every man was tense, but it was a call of no importance. Too soon to be hearing anyway. He blew a smoke ring.

There had been disasters before in this business; he had been in on some of them. There would be still more disasters before men beat the storms. He thought bitterly again, "*Act of God!*"

In the silence he heard the clock tick; it was seven-twenty-three.

Pablo, the Mexican, finished patrolling his stretch of track. The plows had passed already; he knew that the streamliner would be along in a few minutes.

Pablo was mountain-born, on the bleak slopes above Toluca where corn fails and men harvest thin fields of barley. Also he was patient and enduring by virtue of his Indian ancestry. So even the intensity of the storm as it had blown up in the last few minutes did not disturb him.

He stepped aside as he heard the streamliner drawing near through the falling snow. After the last car had sped by and gone out of sight around the curve, only the sound of the wind in the trees was left upon the mountainside, and in that seeming hush Pablo heard the plane.

Impulsively he crossed himself. "*Jesús de mi vida!*" he said. Pablo was used to the planes; hourly, east and west, they passed over him; he saw them sharp-cut against the sun; he saw them even at night as gleams in the moonlight or moving shadows against the star-lit sky.

This plane he did not see. But somewhere low in that close-hanging cloud he heard it. He judged that it was coming from the east, but it did not pass on quickly and steadily out of hearing. Now the roar of engines was loud; now it was dimmed out. Even Pablo knew that the plane was in trouble,

buffeted here and there, fighting, lost, beaten down until it was low over the mountain-tops.

Pablo had the secrecy bred of long generations of slavery. He did not stare about as an American would have done, eager to be the first to report even a disaster. Instead, he walked stolidly along the track through the storm, not looking around. He could not shut the noise out of his ears, and he knew craftily that the plane was moving off northward. But he did not wish to be mixed in the affair. If anybody should ask him about it, he was ready to think first, "No se nadal!" and then translate this into "Don't know nothing about it!"

At French Bar Power-House the snow had melted under the warm rain, and now everything was awash in the cloudburst. The gang was out tending to some lines. Johnny Martley, half-drowned under the downpour, was trying to do a dozen things at once to control the water. It was gullying the road in a half dozen places, threatening to flood two basements and the garage, and in general looking as if it might wash the whole place over the edge into the canyon.

When his wife whooped at him from the porch, he knew that the L.D. had called, and he was also pretty sure what the call was about. They had been caught with the dam nearly full, and now this cloudburst would send the water over the top unless the sluice gates were opened—maybe it would go over anyway. He had been waiting for orders.

"Yes," he said to the L.D. "The water's close up to the top, and all the streams are coming down a-boiling. She'll spill in no time. I'll go right away."

"How's everything else?"

"The boys are away on that job still. Everything loose around the place is washing down the canyon. I've been out with a shovel busier than a monkey, and wet as a trout."

Just as he opened the front door, his wife yelled that there was a leak in the living-room.

"Set out a pan," he yelled back.

He hurried along the narrow trail at the lip of the canyon. A dozen rivulets were rushing across it, and then a few feet beyond cascaded off into space. Ten, twenty, or fifty feet they dropped as little waterfalls until they hit some rock ledge or the sloping wall of the canyon, leaped out in spray, gathered for another fall, and so at last reached the bottom, three hundred feet below.

Martley picked his way along the trail. He went quickly, but his footwork was as neat as a lightweight boxer's. It was not a healthy time or place for a slip. The wind came in great gusts, taking him off his balance. The rain was in spurts—

now merely a spatter, now a deluge as if someone were throwing buckets of water. When rain and wind struck together the man had to brace himself against them, crouching, steadying himself with his right hand against the rocks on the upper side of the trail. A few feet to his left was the void of the canyon. The little rivulets, as he crossed them, hardly slopped his ankles, but if he should slip and fall their rush of water might be enough to carry him downward before he could catch himself.

As he neared the dam, he saw that the water was almost level with the top; the wind was upstream; even so, an occasional wave was slopping over. It was an old-fashioned dam, not well designed to spill; if it went at all, it went along the whole crest; that was why the L.D. always watched the sluice-gates. But this time, thought Martley, the L.D. for once had missed. The gates should have been opened twenty-four hours ago; now the water was coming in faster than the sluices could carry it off; but anyway no harm was likely to result.

He unpadlocked the little steel door just below the overhang of the dam, went in, closed it behind him, and snapped on the lights. He was in a cramped passageway inside the solid concrete of the dam. He went along it a few yards until it ended at a round hole just large enough for a man to descend. Far down the hole one electric light after another, far apart, glowed with a dull, wet gleam.

He lowered himself into the hole, found with his foot a steel rung projecting from the concrete wall, grasped an upper rung with his hands, and began to descend. The hole was so small that he brushed against the concrete with hips and shoulders. Everything was wet with the seepage of water through the dam. The farther he went the more water dripped upon him from above. He descended steadily without hurry, knowing that he had two hundred thirty feet to go.

Usually he made the descent with a companion, and now even his well-trained nerves felt the isolation and the almost physical inward pressure of the monolithic concrete. He was an ant crawling through some minute crevice of a great rock. Each light, yellow in the dripping atmosphere, seemed a friend as he drew near it. As it receded he felt a touch of primitive panic. But still he descended steadily from rung to rung, taking care that neither hand nor foot slipped on the wet rounds of steel.

U.S. 40 was open again, and this day was not so bad as the Superintendent had feared. At the lower levels there was a cloudburst, but it was falling as rain. The cloudburst was so violent that it exhausted itself on the lower and middle

to the west of the summit, snow-squalls alternated with lulls which of snow kept falling. In between the lower and els was a belt of blinding snowfall, but it extended y a few miles of road, and so the Superintendent and easily keep it clear.

and just talked to a rotary-operator and was getting to his car; then he heard the mutter of a plane. He d upward involuntarily, but of course saw nothing. If ould hardly see across the road, you couldn't see any into the air.

ust be like flying through the water in a washing-machine," he thought.

he was used to hearing the planes overhead even in what ned to him impossible flying-weather. Still, he wondered. ere he stood, he was somewhat sheltered in a thick forest spruce and cedar; even so, the wind came in great gusts d swirls. And the noise of the engines seemed loud, as if e plane had been forced too low. Might be just a trick of e wind. Still— He noted mentally just where he was on e road. If a man offered information (or testimony) it ough to be accurate. He looked at his watch. Seven-thirty-six.

When Big Al had passed over Reno it had been full daylight, but the visibility was getting rapidly worse instead of better. He went on, following the Reno beam. Ten minutes later he was getting close to the summit, and things looked so doubtful ahead that he fully expected to be ordered around any moment and told to land. Reno would have been fair landing when he passed over, but might be hard by the time he could get back to it.

Then inside of a minute, things had got bad. He could have turned around on his own responsibility, but he did not like to seem to lose his nerve—and maybe Reno had been buttoned up too. He was at eleven-thousand, leaving a good two thousand feet of room to get over the near-by peaks. The air was rough, and the plane was in thick cloud; a little ice was forming. Any moment he hoped to come out into one of those long clear spaces with stratus banks above and below and maybe a mountain top just showing through lower bank. Then suddenly Jerry yelled at him:

"Bay trying to contact us; got the signal, but she faded static."

At that moment Big Al saw the whole picture. He just about to make headlines, perhaps. Maybe the head would keep running for several days until someone sp

the crashed plane and the charred bodies. He felt coldly calm, and decided to go ahead. Bay was just as likely telling them to keep away from Reno as to turn back and land there. Half a minute later, he knew that he had made the wrong decision.

He'd have done better to try for some emergency field or even take her clear back to Elko on the reserve gas. A side-swipe took the plane, and then she went into a down-draught. He fought to regain control and get back altitude. (He hated to think what was happening among the passengers.) By the time he had control he was off the beam over in the N-sector somewhere. For the moment it was more important to get back some altitude than to hunt the beam. Just then he went into a thunderstorm, and even the N-signal disappeared. All he could do was to fight for control. If he kept moving west, he would gain altitude as the slope of the mountains fell away. Already he felt the drag of the ice; the de-icers couldn't handle it; the weight was not so much as the distortion which the ice made in the flying-surfaces; the plane was getting hard to handle.

And then, almost at his level, a mile away perhaps but looking close enough to touch, some black fangs of crags seemed to drift by—too steep for snow to rest on. There was nothing like them along the air-lanes. The Sierra Buttes, maybe, he thought. If so, he was already miles off his course, to the north. He fought for control, and to keep to the west.

Blue Boy, the big boar, decided that he would get back to his dry shed. With the rain still sluicing down in torrents he trotted stolidly along the semblance of a trail which the feet of animals and men had worn on the steep hillside. When he came to the gully, he paused a moment, hesitating. Usually the gully was dry; even during most of the storm it had flowed an insignificant amount of water; but now, such was the cloudburst, the stream rushed six feet wide across the ledge. Above and below, it was a series of waterfalls.

Blue Boy plunged ahead. He was almost across, when his long, low-hung body began to act like a dam. The water piled up in a wave against his upstream side; its buoyancy suddenly neutralized his weight; at the same moment his left hind-foot slipped.

He was rolled over, kicking, ten feet downhill to the next ledge. He squealed shrilly, as a root scraped his tender snout. He struck the ledge more or less on his feet, and indignantly started to scramble out almost as he lit. But to scramble he had to crouch first, the buoyancy of the water tricked him again, and its sweep carried him away.

This time he went farther, and hit on his back with a

crash. For a moment he had another chance, but he was already bruised, half-drowned, and completely confused. His feet pawed the air uselessly for an instant, then a new wave shoved his forequarters around, washing him off the ledge, and dropped him head-foremost. Six feet down, he hit with a thud, all but smothering one shoulder; the shock took all the fight out of him. Convulsively sucking in for another squeal, he sucked water instead of air.

From then on, he was an inert mass. The torrent buried him end over end, and cracked his rump on a boulder. Where the water might have grounded him, his momentum as a falling body carried him on; it hurled him downward through bushes and vines. For the last thirty feet he rolled, spinning like a log. At the bottom he crashed through the barbed-wire fence, rolled three times more, and came to rest as his midriff suddenly crashed against something solid.

His whole descent had not occupied ten seconds. He had hit against the place where the two big pipes of a culvert came together. The culvert passed under the railway; his forequarters sagged limply inside one pipe; his hindquarters inside the other.

He was not yet dead, but he was too battered to save himself. The position of his body obstructed the flow; the water quickly rose higher, covered mouth and nostrils, and drowned him.

Opening the sluice-gates unaided was something of a job; when Martley had finished, he was tired. He listened for just a moment to the water sweeping through beneath him. Then he thought of the leak in his living-room, and the road washing away, and a dozen greater emergencies which might arise any moment. He turned and went rapidly along the narrow passageway leading to the hole up which he must climb. "Gotta hurry," he thought. "Sure is a busy day!"

The passageway was just high enough for a man to walk; now and then his shoulders brushed the sides. Seepage water dripped from the top and oozed through the walls; the air was so wet that he half seemed to be breathing water; he coughed. From above, from the sides, the concrete of the great dam—millions of tons—pressed in upon him.

Ahead in the passageway as far as the bottom of the hole one electric light after another sent out a feeble yellow gleam. Then—without a warning flicker—they all went out. Black as Hell's basement and the fires out!

The darkness stopped the man in his tracks like a blow. The unexpected loss of his best sense brought momentary panic, but he suppressed it so quickly that he hardly missed the time of two strides. In the narrow passageway there was

no chance of getting lost; he knew the distances and the hazards. He remembered where he was when the lights went out; as he walked he methodically counted his paces to know when he should expect to arrive at the end of the passageway. What worried him was why the lights had gone. In the storm anything might happen from the breakage of a local wire up to some major disaster. He hurried even faster; his men would need him; the L.D. might be calling. "Sure is a busy day!"—And this time he unconsciously spoke out loud for company and courage; he started as the voice reverberated hollowly from the concrete walls.

Reaching ahead with his left hand he felt the end of the passageway. With his right hand, groping in the blackness, he found a steel rung—wet, cold, and slick. He began to climb upward into the narrow hole which he could not even see was there; it was as if he forced his way by will-power right into the concrete.

Not for nothing had he been Superintendent at French Bar for eleven years. He knew every detail of the dam. He had to climb upward two hundred thirty feet, and the rungs were ten and a half inches apart—two hundred sixty-nine rungs.

One—two—three—four. Counting to himself, he climbed by feel in the darkness—hand over hand, foot following foot. The water splattered upon him; he coughed in the dank air. Twenty-eight—twenty-nine—thirty—thirty-one. He was climbing as fast as he dared. Forty-five—forty-six. His heart began to pound. His feet grew heavy. Sixty-six—sixty-seven. The hole was too small to give him free action. He felt cramps in his loins. Eighty—eighty-one—eighty—! (His left hand missed a grip and threw him out of rhythm.) Eighty-two—eighty-three. There was a pain across his chest and his ankle tendons were numb. He kept on grimly. *One hundred!* Then he rested. He took the next hundred again without halting. On rung two hundred, as he rested, he saw the dim little circle of half-light still high above him.

His feet were heavy from the start, but he took the last sixty-nine rungs with a rush. He was wondering what had happened to his power-house. Were the dynamos still purring steadily like sleek happy cats? Had something smashed? Had the L.D. called? Exhausted, like a man finishing a race, he pulled himself out of the hole. Leaking in from the closed door was a dim halo of light. He stumbled toward it. He was suddenly conscious of some unusual roaring noise. He flung the door open; the flood of light blinded him for the moment; he put one foot out—and then paused. There was no wind, but only the strange roar, and spray—not like rain—in his face.

In half a breath his sight came back to him, but for the moment he was not sure that he saw aright. There was no canyon wall, no swirling rain—only a solid wall of falling water. The dam was spilling; he was trapped.

Perhaps it was the mere inrush of water from the streams swollen by the clondburst; perhaps a wind-shift had piled water against the dam instead of the other direction. As he had feared, the opening of the sluice-gates was not enough; but he had not realized that it would be so soon.

Because of the overhang there was a space of five feet between the doorway and the falling water. He looked one way and then the other, seeking escape. To the left his view ended against the solid wall of a concrete buttress. To the right his glance ran far along the sheer front of the dam with the water pouring over it; a few feet from where he stood the ground fell off and disappeared into the canyon.

He reached out, picked up a stone, and threw it. From long experience with flowing water he knew from the way the stone disappeared that the solid-looking wall could not be more than an inch or so thick. It was falling only fifteen feet from the top of the dam. Given level and sure footing, a man could rush through such a waterfall, and no harm done. But here he had only a rough trail on the sloping rock-face and the precipice a few feet to one side. The best man in the world would be swept down. Courage would be only foolishness. If he stayed where he was, he would be safe; eventually the boys would come and pass a life-line through to him, or the dam would quit spilling. The storm wouldn't last much longer.

But not for a moment did Martley consider staying where he was—tamely. He remembered his leaderless men, his dynamos, the leak in the living-room, and the L.D. "I'm too busy to stay here," he thought.

He cast about for some means of escape. A few bits of junk lay in the passageway. They were useless. But just outside the door he saw a worn and rusted half-inch cable. Some construction boss had cast it aside as no longer trustworthy; but even if it were nine-tenths rusted through, the steel would still hold the weight of a man.

Martley grabbed the end and pulled. The cable extended through somewhere beyond the wall of water. Martley dragged it in, hoping that the other end was stuck firmly. But it yielded; he pulled the loose end through the water, and found himself with thirty feet of cable.

"I can't stay here; I'm too busy," he thought again.

Martley looped one end of the cable around upon itself. He pounded it with a stone for a hammer. The rusty pro-

ecting ends of wire tore at his hands, but he fabricated a loop about three feet in diameter.

Just outside the doorway he dug his heels in for a firm footing. He was so close to the falling water that he could reach it with his finger-tips. Like a cowboy on foot making ready to rope his pony, he stood with the awkward steel loop in his right hand. He cast it at the wall of water.

It struck flatways, and was flung back. He corrected his aim. This time it disappeared neatly through the water. He pulled hopefully, but the loop came back to him without much resistance. He gathered it to his hand, and stood for a moment judging distance and direction.

In eleven years he had come to know every detail about his dam. He knew that just beyond the water stood three rocks close together. If he could cast the looped cable among them it might stick.

The third attempt did not pierce the water. The fourth went through, seemed to stick, and then yielded as he pulled a little harder. He tried again and again—now with no luck at all, now with enough hint of success to keep him trying.

He was a methodical man and kept his count. The eleventh and fourteenth throws stuck momentarily. By now he knew exactly where the rocks must be. But the fifteenth try was a complete miss; his arm was tired.

On the sixteenth throw he was careful. He pulled in; the cable ran freely for a foot and then stuck with a sudden jam. He was sure he had it! He pulled hard; he rested a moment, and then strained with his full weight. The cable was solid.

There was, of course, a very good chance that, when he swung through an arc of more than a right angle, he would slip the loop off whatever projection held it. "I can't stay here all day," he thought.

He grasped the cable at a point which he knew was about eight feet from whatever (presumably the rocks) the loop was caught on. He did not plunge at the waterfall. He merely stuck his head and shoulders into it, and felt the rush take him from his feet. He held his breath and gripped the steel strands. The sluice of the water swept him across the sloping rock, but he knew that holding the cable he must swing in a circle. Beneath his left foot was nothing; he felt the void of the canyon sucking him down. He knew that he had been too reckless, but he gripped the cable.

Then, still gripping the cable, he was lying on the sloping rock with water rushing against his face and shoulders. The loop of the cable was holding. Under his feet was empty space. He raised his face above the foaming rush, and heard the thunder of water plunging into the canyon. He panted a

before daring to move. Then he bent over, reached himself half a foot forward. He pulled up his knee, and felt the roughness of rock beneath his foot. Then did he dare to loose one hand and move it up on the floor for a fresh grip. (Even at that moment he felt, more heard, the hum of the dynamos, and knew that the failure of the lights inside the dam had been purely local; the going over the dam must have caused it.) The rest was easy.

"Did the L.D. call?" he yelled at his wife from the doorway.

"No!" she yelled back from where she was washing the breakfast dishes. "What made you so long?"

"Oh—nothing much!"

He was glad she did not come to look at him. His face and hands were scraped and bleeding; his pants-knees were torn out. He grabbed the shovel from where he had left it on the porch, and hurried off to see about the road.

At the airport they waited. Waited. The radio-operators were listening. Now and then they tried to make contact. Minute passed by minute. Seven-fifty-four; seven-fifty-five. In the air, minutes count like hours on land or sea. The CSO sat there. He said nothing. There was nothing to say. Or to do! "Act of God!" Seven-fifty-six. No contact.

Eight o'clock. Big Al due in at eight-thirty-five. Outside, the sun was shining. To the south the airways fine as silk. A Los Angeles plane taking off. Keep things moving—as if nothing has happened. Maybe nothing *has* happened. Maybe. Somebody came in. "Lottie's out there!" he half whispered. Al's wife—married six months. Used to be a stewardess. They all knew Lottie. Nice little thing. The guys joking Al about a baby.

Who's the best bluffer? Send him out. Let him kid along with Lottie. Don't say anything. Not yet. (Pretty hard to bluff a stewardess.) Buy her a drink. No. She'd think that was funny. Buy her a coffee. God, why'd she have to come so early?

Only eight-two! You mean—eight-two already! People will be coming to meet the passengers. They won't be working. Sun shining. You wouldn't think things could be so hot inside of two hundred miles. Would you now? Really. "of God!" "Prince of the power of the air!" Eight-thirty.

A half dozen men had gathered in the lounge-car just eight o'clock. The conductor came in.

"Good morning," said a passenger, "On time—"

Just then the brakes went on with a grab that shook

the whole car. One passenger went right down in the aisle, the others flopped half over in the chairs. By the time they pulled themselves up the conductor was gone.

"God! Emergency stop!"

"Anybody hurt?"

The train was standing still. The men peered out. The rain was falling by bucketfuls. On one side the train was close against the steeply sloping wall of a canyon. On the other side—across the up-track—the canyon-wall dropped off fifty feet more to a roaring stream. The clouds were drifting in so low that they covered most of the opposite wall of the canyon beyond the stream.

"Nasty place! Glad we didn't go off the track!"

They waited five minutes—ten minutes. They speculated what the trouble might be. The porter had no idea; no trainmen showed up.

"We'll not get in on time anyway. Tough! Here we hit every stop on the nose all the way across, and get held up just at the end."

"Come on," said a young man to his companion, "let's go out. Maybe there's been an accident."

The sheets of rain made them hesitate, but once they had their overcoats on, neither one wanted to be the first to back down. They hurried along toward the engine, where the trainmen gathered about.

They saw, not fifty feet ahead of the engine, water flooding across the tracks. Already it had washed out a lot of ballast, and the outside track was hanging in a long sag; even the inside track was much too doubtful-looking to risk the passage of a train.

The conductor was shaking his head. "Look at that track!" he said. "The track-walker just found it in time to stop us—lucky he did, too! But not even a crew here to work on it yet. It'll be two hours if it's a minute. Lucky if we get away under three."

Only by a narrow margin was the whole train not lying a crumpled tangle in the brawling torrent of the North Fork. "Tough steel, aluminum alloys, resplendent chromium, satiny copper, crimson leather, shining glass—miracle of modern engineering and art"—the streamliner stood still, balked in its course. All the cunning of wires and clockwork, of lights and semaphores, was as nothing before some trick of the storm.

Just then a draggled little track-walker came slopping up-track through the water. He had mud and slime all over him, and his language matched the slime.

"What you know!" he blurted. "That one pipe clogged so tight she not running water—just a little mud. I crawl up through there; think I see what's wrong. What you think

jammed in there and blocked the pipes—drowned—a great big hog!"

Minute by minute Big Al fought the storm. He could feel the drag of the ice. Lightning crackled all around; the radio roared with static. Now and then the whine of the beam came through or some blurred words—Bay trying to get them. But it was no use trying to follow a beam. He tried to keep to the west. Once an air draft dropped him so fast that he thought he was gone; he looked ahead for the mountainside that would come crashing through the mist. But nothing came through the mist, and he fought for altitude with his logy, heavy plane. Side gusts tossed him back and forth. (He didn't dare to think what was happening to the passengers.) He himself was tired as a dog. In the air minutes count like hours. What kept him going was the thought that it couldn't be so bad as it was, and last very long. Then suddenly he knew that he had wished it would be over pretty soon—one way or the other. That was his first touch of panic.

He tried to think of the plane itself. The engines were sweet as you ever heard. Everything else was fine. Just a little heavy with ice, and that didn't seem to be getting worse very fast. But the machine's being so fine, strangely, didn't make him feel better. It only made him feel that the man, by contrast, was the weak part that was going to pieces. Already he knew that he didn't trust his instruments, and when a pilot doesn't trust his instruments, he's going bad. But just the same, he began trying to look for the ground to know where he was. But there wasn't any ground—naturally. He was tired; he was going bad; he knew it.

The worst blast of all struck him. He was sure it was the end. He bit his tongue to keep himself alert, and just managed to keep her under control.

And then—so suddenly that he blinked and looked again—there, just ahead was blue sky—blue as water. The moment he saw it he felt rested. He knew he was all right. He'd flown right through the front. That last wallop had been the final wind-shift. There might be more squalls, but he'd be all right. He saw more blue sky, and then a glimpse of ground—foothill country. Just then the Bay operator came through as clear as if he were on a direct wire.

Five minutes later the plane was heading south over the Sacramento Valley. (The passengers were getting hold of their stomachs again.) Off to the southwest Big Al was watching two showers, but they didn't amount to much. He'd been blown miles out of his course, northward; but he'd be landing inside of an hour.

Through eleven days the storm had flourished and been strong. Tyrannical, it had drawn power to itself from the north and the south. From the Arctic to the tropics, in great circuit, it had ruled the air, and troubled the sea, and warred against the mountains.

It had been as a conquering king who boasts in bronze—I was great and increased more than all that were before me; I gathered silver and gold, the treasure of kings and of the provinces. It had been as a firm-founded nation—vigorous in youth, virile in prime, knowing no doubt of the future.

The king and the nation seem unassailable, but within them breeds decay. Time is a strong warrior.

While the king sits enthroned, the generation of worms makes ready. To everything there is a season—a time to be born and a time to die. There is a time for the breaking of nations. Of storms also it is written, "This too shall pass away."

Far off, the sun at a certain angle with respect to the revolving earth had for a while shone favorably for the continuance of this particular eddy of air. Now its existence was becoming no longer possible. The storm had seemed some emperor of the air; actually it was only a puppet-king.

The storm was dying, but even in death it was great. The last front, close to a thousand miles in length, revolving like the spoke of a wheel about the storm-center far at sea, hurled itself against the mountains. Great pines tossed wildly as the fierce wind-shift took them aback; thick branches snapped; whole trees went down. Then the front had passed on, and the steady cold wind from the northwest was scattering the clouds.

Onward moved the front, still revolving about the far-distant center. It burst in snow-squalls upon the sawtoothed desert ranges; on the high plateau it powdered the sagebrush with shining crystals; the quick snap of its wind-shift whipped the desert junipers. But its stores of moisture drawn from the tropical sea were already exhausted upon the mountains. As midday neared and passed, the wall of the front ceased to advance so vigorously; the snow-flurries were fewer.

Hour by hour over thousands of square miles, from the solid surface of the earth upward to the quiet of the stratosphere, the air acknowledged a new dominion. The great storm was dying.

TWELFTH DAY

THE STORM during its life had traveled a third of the way round the world; at its height, it had encompassed an area larger than the United States of America.

By mixing in gigantic proportions the northern and southern air the storm had helped adjust the inequalities of heat between equator and pole.

Next notable of its actions was the transfer of water from ocean to land. One inch of rain falling upon one square mile totals a weight of seventy thousand tons. Rain and snow from this single storm had fallen over a land area of more than two hundred thousand square miles, and the average precipitation of water was several inches.

Of all this water a little had already been reabsorbed into the dry air following after the last front. Another small amount had been impounded behind man-made dams. Somewhat more had passed through natural channels and returned to the ocean. Much remained as snow—attaining a depth of many feet—upon the higher mountains. Much was contained in the flooded streams, and was somewhat violently engaged in flowing toward tidewater. Another large part was held within the now saturated earth. Still another had gone into vegetation, for in many places the grass had grown an inch during the storm.

The third notable work of the storm was its lowering of the land-surface. Here by landslide, there by less spectacular erosion, the water had carried millions of cubic yards of earth a greater or less distance toward the ocean.

Besides these cosmic effects, the direct influence of the storm upon men seems small and secondary. *Good* and *bad* lose their meaning, and exist only according to point of view, within a limited range of vision.

"Sixteen dead by storm," declared the *Register*. This would doubtless be rated a bad effect, but perhaps the world was better off because of these deaths. And even the accuracy of the headline can be impugned. (Does the match or the powder cause the explosion?) The sixteen died not because of the storm but because of their own mortality. The storm was merely the occasion; after a few years they would in any case have died.

But if the editor was to hold the storm responsible for sixteen deaths, why not for hundreds? Many invalids died dur-

ing the days of the storm, their deaths precipitated by
and heart-depressions, attributable to the weather. Some
healthy persons suffered wet feet which led to colds, pneu-
monia, and death within a few weeks. Other colds resulted in
weakened resistance which opened the way to various fatal
diseases.

"Million-dollar rain," was another headline in the Register.
This, doubtless, would be rated a good effect. But the saving
of a crop in California might quite possibly lead to bear
raids in Chicago, foreclosures in Oklahoma, suicides in
Florida, strikes in Massachusetts, and executions in Turkey.

As with the so-called bad, the so-called good was often far
removed and difficult to appraise. Only a few entomologists
realized that the rain, falling just when it did, destroyed bil-
lions of grasshopper eggs, and prevented a plague six months
later.

Even aside from its cosmic effects the storm had thus vi-
tally affected, in one way or another, the life of every human
being in the region. It had accomplished all this without being
itself catastrophic or even unusual.

2

The particular storm known as Maria to the Junior Meteor-
ologist in San Francisco had rained, snowed, and blown
chiefly upon California, secondarily upon the neighboring
states. But there was in the nature of this storm nothing
peculiar to that region alone.

Maria was dead. But on the eighth day of her life she had
begun (after the strange manner of storms) to give birth to
a new storm which the Junior Meteorologist had called Little
Maria. Now four days old, no longer little, having swept the
southeastern states, this storm centered over New York City.

In the Appalachians as in the Sierra Nevada, wires came
down. The Peedee and the Santee, like the Sacramento, rolled
flood-waters seaward. Snow-plows fought drifts in the
Catskills as in the Siskiyou. Trains and buses ran into places
where they were grounded.

In New York City the Department of Sanitation mobilized
fifteen thousand men to clear snow from the streets. The
Commissioner announced that mechanized equipment for
work included 177 rotary brooms, 377 snowplows, 619 crosswalk
plows, 46 sanders, and 1,245 trucks and cars attached; he added that he was ready to call on the reserves
of men, and was making ready 262 pieces of equipment.

The wind howled a hundred-mile gale over the State Building. Pedestrians, jack-knives, slipped and fell on the snowy sidewalks.

balance and blown against a stone buttress, went down with a fractured skull. Wind gusts swept a workman from a scaffolding, and he broke his neck. Falling signs injured seven. Accidents were so numerous that hospitals reserved ambulances for the more severe cases. An emergency squad of police roped several squares for safety, and the few passers-by clung to the ropes as if to life-lines.

Station WKY reported twenty-one interruptions to service between five and ten A.M. Williamsburg Bridge was closed to traffic while the sweepers cleared it. Pulaski Skyway was blocked for two hours.

In the harbor a freighter broke its moorings. A South American liner was held up in the lower bay, and docked four hours after announced time. A coast-guard cutter went out to rescue a fishing-boat. From fifty miles beyond Sandy Hook a tanker radioed: "Steering gear carried away; helpless in full gale; all ships close by please help."

In Queens the power company reported ninety poles down and two thousand families without lights. In Bronx Park a freak twisting wind snapped hundreds of branches. Four elevated lines in Brooklyn suspended all traffic for forty minutes of the morning rush-hour, marooning thousands of passengers. La Guardia Field cancelled all flights.

His Honor the Mayor whimsically stated to some reporters that he used to be able to enjoy snowstorms, but now he had to worry about what the cost of snow-clearance did to the budget. While His Honor happened to be looking from one of his office windows, the flagpole in City Hall Park—fifth to stand there since the original liberty pole of the Revolution—snapped off and fell.

In the midst of disaster there was rejoicing. The Water Department announced gleefully that the heavy snowfall upstate would do much to make up a critical deficiency in the City's reservoirs. Five hundred public-school children received a holiday because some heating equipment was disabled. Rena Carey, a declining Hollywood star, broke into all the picture sections with a photograph which showed her on a slippery sidewalk skidding into the arms of a tall policeman.

But at least there were no deaths from cold. The storm had moved from the southwest, bringing only gales and sticky snow. "This snow follows necessarily," commented a learned writer of editorials, "from the fact that our ancestors chose to locate this city in a rather snowy part of the snowiest of all continents."

where the scattered houses showed no lights. On his other side, the patrol looked out almost on his own level, and saw the brown backwater among the leafless willows of the stream-margin; beyond the willows flowed the swift water of the channel.

At one o'clock word was telephoned from Kennett, far north under the peak of Shasta, that the upper Sacramento had crested at twenty-four-point-six, and was falling. This crest was high enough to be dangerous, but it would not arrive in the lower river for several days and could be disregarded for the moment.

The critical stream was still the American. Although the rain in the foothills had ceased twelve hours previous, the crest had not yet had time to descend to the plain. Every fifteen minutes the General had a telephone call from his deputy at Sacramento gauge where the American poured into the main river. Hour by hour the water rose—twenty-seven-point-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-eight-point-one.

By now so much water was flooding from the American that it almost monopolized the main channel below its mouth. The water from the upper river had topped the wickets of Sacramento Weir, and was flowing across in streams two feet deep. At either end of the long weir a man stood on guard; the moonlight glinted upon the star of a deputy sheriff and showed the bulge of the pistol at his hip. There were many people who might like to have those wickets opened, and the General was taking no chances.

Between two and three, the gauge held steady. Perhaps, thought the General, the crest had arrived; perhaps he had held the American. But then the gauge crept up—twenty-eight-point-three, twenty-eight-point-five. Beyond twenty-nine it must not go. The trouble, the General suddenly realized, was with the Sacramento itself. Under present conditions the four miles between the weir and the mouth of the American should be practically still water. But now the outlet through the weir was not sufficient, and the water still pressed down against the outflow of the American and rose against the levees around the sleeping city. The telephone rang, and the deputy reported twenty-eight-point-seven. On top of that was another call—police headquarters; a patrol-car just reporting, three inches of seepage water covering a street. Again the telephone—northwest wind freshening, waves slopping at the top of the American levee, we're holding it with a row of sand-bags; not dangerous—yet.

The General shrugged his shoulders. Like a good soldier he had held his lines until he could retreat with honor. He gave his orders.

